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# Decolonisation and the Politics of Transition in South Asia

CRITICAL THINKING IN SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY

Edited by

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

A Reader

This volume interrogates the concept of decolonisation, which is often taken to mean a transfer of power from a colonial to an indigenous elite. However, decolonisation involved a much more complex historical experience for the people of the postcolonial nations. It did not necessarily mean a clinical break with the past, but was rather an incomplete, complicated process, as different groups began to seek different meanings of freedom and imagined multiple pathways for their future development. Old nationalisms were questioned and new identities were born, as fresh boundaries were drawn, both geographically and socially.

This book captures some of these complexities of the decolonisation process in South Asia—across India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh—by focusing on these uncertainties and debates of the transition period from colonial to the postcolonial. The essays engage with a range of issues related to decolonisation, including electoral systems, forms of political systems, democracy and authoritarianism, economic planning, armed insurrection, ideological consensus and conflict, minority rights and exclusivist politics.

With contributions from eminent scholars from across disciplines, this volume will be of great interest to students of history, political science and political sociology.

# Decolonisation and the Politics of Transition in South Asia

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edited by
Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

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To the memory of my teacher

**Professor Barun De**
(1932–2013)

I learnt a lot from him, but never had a chance
to acknowledge.

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7 January 2016

**Sekhar Bandyopadhyay**
Victoria University of Wellington

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ADC | Aides-de-camp |
| AICC | All India Congress Committee |
| AIHM | All-India Hindu Mahasabha |
| AIMMM | All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat |
| AISCF | All-India Scheduled Caste Federation |
| BNP | Bangladesh National Party |
| BOAC | Briish Overseas Airways Corporation |
| BSP | Bahujan Samaj Party |
| CA | Constituent Assembly |
| CC | Central Committee |
| CENTO | Central Treaty Organization |
| CPI | Communist Party of India |
| CPI(M) | Communist Part of India(Marxist) |
| CPI(ML) | Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICS | Indian Civil Service |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INA | Indian National Army |
| INC | Indian National Congress |
| IOL | India Office Library |
| IOR | India Office Records |
| IPS | Indian Political Service |
| JIH | Jamat-e-Islami-Hind |
| JUH | Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind |
| MLA | Member of Legislative Assembly |
| MQM | Muttahida Qaumi Movement (previously Muhajir Qaumi Movement) |
| NAI | National Archives of India |
| NMML | Nehru Memorial Museum and Library |

| | |
|---|---|
| NPC | National Planning Committee |
| NWFP | North-West Frontier Province |
| PB | politburo |
| PNP | Pakistan National Party |
| PPP | Pakistan People's Party |
| PRO | Public Record Office |
| PSP | Praja Socialist Party |
| RIN | Royal Indian Navy |
| RPI | Republican Party of India |
| RSP | Revolutionary Socialist Party |
| RSS | Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh |
| SC | Scheduled Caste |
| SCF | Scheduled Castes Federation |
| SEATO | Southeast Asia Treaty Organization |
| SLFP | Sri Lanka Freedom Party |
| TFF | Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNP | United National Party |
| UP | Uttar Pradesh |
| US | United States |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

# Introduction

## Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

### I

Decolonisation in extant historical literature is usually depicted as a political event marking the end of European empires in Asia and Africa, resulting in 'the transfer of power from empire to nation-state' (Springhall 2001: 2; Mansergh 1970–83), or more realistically, from the hands of a colonising European ruling class to those of an indigenous political elite. The term 'decolonisation', thus defined from a colonial metropolitan perspective—as opposed to the expression of national liberation preferred by the citizens of the new nations—privileges the specific political events of withdrawal of imperial control, necessitated by various factors, and following dissimilar historical trajectories of withdrawal, depending on the nature of different imperialisms. British imperialism in India, for example, in contrast to Dutch and French imperialisms in Southeast Asia, is considered to be 'ambidextrous', that is, ambivalent and oscillating—as D. A. Low tells us. While India was fancied as a prized possession, which Britain always wanted to hold on to, liberal political reforms were also introduced to seek legitimacy by conceding the fact that one day Indians were to be given the right to self-determination (Low 1997: 1–40). This dualism in British imperial policy affected the course of nationalist opposition it faced, dictated the strategies it devised to deal with it, and ultimately determined the trajectory it followed to withdraw from the empire. The British had to leave, we are sometimes told, because liberal political opinion at home would not tolerate ruthless repression of the political aspirations of the colonised people, however much it wanted to hold on to the empire (Low 1991: 1–21). To this, one may add other purported arguments, such as empire being considered as burdensome or serving no economic or strategic interests and therefore not worth fighting for. This 'metropolitan theory' of decolonisation, as John Darwin (1991: 5) calls it, looks at the event solely from the perspective of the mother country.

By contrast, the 'international theory' argues that in addition to domestic pressures, Britain was forced to withdraw from empire because of the post-war bi-polar political world order, where Britain was too weak to hold on to its imperial possessions. Financially, it was too dependent on the $ 3.75 billion loan granted by the United States (US) in July 1946. And ideologically, as David George Boyce puts it, 'it was a world ever increasingly critical of the imperial idea' (Boyce 1999: 113–15). After the signing of the United Nations (UN) Charter, the idea of empire had become unsustainable—the Dutch and French empires too collapsed under concerted international pressures.

But contrary to all these explanations, the 'peripheral theory' of decolonisation (Darwin 1991: 5–7) looks for its historical antecedents in the colonies and privileges the anti-colonial nationalist struggles as primarily responsible for the dissolution of empires. In India, after World War II it increasingly became evident that a major nationalist upsurge would be difficult to handle with the usual instruments of coercive power. As John Darwin puts it: 'Coercion, as the ultimate weapon of British policy in India against recalcitrant nationalism, as the bedrock of British rule for 190 years, was defunct' (Darwin 1988: 92). So the British decided to leave. A significant literature now exists on this nationalist movement, the mass upsurges that it involved, and the historic *event* of British retreat from the Indian Empire, which it led to (see for details Bandyopadhyay 2009b).

The essays in this book will however show that decolonisation was much more than an *event*—it was a long-drawn-out *process* of political transition. On the one side of it was of course the withdrawal of the imperial order; but on the other side was the shaping of new nations, for example, defining of political identities and inter-community relations, the construction of the infrastructure of governance and the determination of its developmental trajectories. And here arises the question of continuity and change. Some of the nationalist elite in India who had led the struggles for freedom had expected that the process of decolonisation would involve a complete reversal of the epistemological and structural framework of the colonial past. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, in his *Hind Swaraj* (1909) had argued in favour of devising indigenous categories and structures of governance; otherwise, he warned, India might end up with 'English rule without the Englishmen' (Gandhi 1997: 28). But possibly such a total reversal or a complete rupture with the past never happened anywhere in the world in the history of decolonisation.

On the other hand, for many historians the most attractive feature of the decolonisation process was continuity. As Darwin argues, Britain never contemplated India to be completely out of the imperial system even after independence and expected it to maintain special links in terms of trade and military services as a member of the Commonwealth (Darwin 1988: 82), and India unquestionably obliged. In addition, D. A. Low has seen continuity in 'innumerable British-type institutions' that were left behind after the demission of empire (1991: 14). Holden Furber observed that India was particularly fortunate to have 'inherited much of the machinery of the former central government and did not have to establish *de novo* either a national capital or a national government' (Furber 1949: 86). Judith Brown too saw continuity in the pageantry, rituals, regalia and the institutions of governance, as these represented a supposedly uninterrupted linear journey towards political modernity (Brown 1994: 349).

In India it is historically undeniable that the continuation of the old structures of civil service, police, army and the judiciary constituted a temporal bridge between its postcolonial present and the colonial past. But the other South Asian postcolonial successor state Pakistan was less fortunate, as it started its life, as Ian Talbot puts it, 'as a seceding state rather than inheritor of the Raj' (Talbot 1998: 96). It did not have a capital, and Karachi was chosen to serve as an interim capital. It had a shortage of bureaucratic personnel, as only 95 Muslim officers of the total strength of 1,157 officers in the Indian Civil Service and Indian Police Service opted to work in Pakistan (Afzal 2002: 15). To make good this shortage, British officers were asked to continue, and they ensured continuity in administration. Apart from that, Pakistan readily adopted the constitutional framework (the Government of India Act 1935) and the governance structures of the British colonial state. Yet decolonisation was not entirely a story of continuity for South Asia.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently argued that the process of decolonisation was 'a historical process' that was 'necessarily clumsy, complicated, and inherently incomplete (that is, fragmentary)' (Chakrabarty 2007: 3). In this sense decolonisation was not a moment of complete rupture, but a long story of transference and adaptation—a process of hybridisation through which the meanings of freedom would be expanded exponentially. Srirupa Roy has described this process as 'continuity yet change' (2007: 27). In their acceptance of liberal modernity as the desired goal for the Indian nation-state, with its categories of nation, democracy, equality and so on, argues Meera Ashar, Indian leaders had accepted the colonial historicist premise on which they were constructed. But this did not mean that they were simply waiting to become like Europe. The 'decolonial project' in her words, was '*a process of translation and transformation of political forms and institutions*' (Ashar 2015: 255, 262–63; emphasis in the original). As Jayanta Sengupta has recently shown in a detailed micro-study of Orissa, all the issues and rhetoric of Oriya politics of the late colonial period, related to development, marginality, regionalism and democracy, continued to dominate politics in the postcolonial, but 'in remarkably different formats', having undergone 'myriad mutations' (Sengupta 2015: 9). Decolonisation was thus a dialogic process between the colonial past and the postcolonial present, a dialogue that has not yet ended. And this dialogue takes place at many levels, as the nation is hardly a homogenous entity, and lives in what Partha Chatterjee has called the 'heterogeneous time of modernity' (Chatterjee 2004: 7, 12, 29, 34, 36).

Ted Svensson has however claimed recently that it was more a 'rupture' than 'continuity', because the 'new political orders were to a large extent newer than what most scholars would like to admit'. It was only the experience of decolonisation and partition which gave the new the appearance of old (Svensson 2013: 24, 34). Harshan Kumarasingham has also shown through a comparative study of post-independence India and Sri Lanka that while the two successor states adopted the British Westminster system of parliamentary democracy, their western educated elites through their practices of power sufficiently adapted the system to local conditions, and often stretched and bent it to take advantage of its relative ambiguity and flexibility. What emerged as a result was, in Kumarasingham's terminology (2013), an 'Eastminster' system, distinctly South Asian in character. The essays in this volume would also show that there was rupture in terms of the institutional structures of postcolonial South Asia, as old colonial institutions underwent significant changes. But there was continuity too, as some of the principles of colonial governance and many of the ideational debates that dominated the discursive terrains of freedom struggle continued into the post-independence period. And these debates of the early decades of independence shaped the subsequent historical development of postcolonial societies and polities in South Asian successor states.

Historians so far have not looked into this process of transition in detail as the historiography of Indian nationalism located the final moment of its fulfilment in the formation of the two nation-states. It seemed as if history ended on 15 August 1947. But, as Ramachandra Guha has observed in his book *India after Gandhi*, 'the first years of freedom were as full of dramatic interest as the last years of the Raj' (Guha 2007: xxii–xxiii). At the moment of arrival of freedom, Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous 'Tryst with destiny' speech reminded his countrymen that the immediate goal of political freedom had been achieved, but the greater challenge was to ensure for every citizen the freedom from poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality (Nehru 2007). And it was this challenge that caused anxiety, as there was no agreement yet on how to grapple with these issues.

There is however a strong argument in support of a postcolonial political consensus in India. Bipan Chandra and his colleagues in their *India after Independence* presented a case for it:

> Starting off with a broad social consensus on the basic contours of the India that was to be built—on the values of nationalism, secularism and democracy and the goals of rapid economic development and radical social change—was a great advantage. These values and goals, and the road to their achievement had been mapped over more than seventy years by the national movement. (Chandra et al. 1999: 1)

It has also been claimed that the Constitution of India, the founding document of the new nation-state, was based on 'the principle of popular sovereignty that was conceived and validated during the prolonged mass mobilizations that characterized the anti-colonial revolution' (Sen 2007: 36).

But despite the fact that this anti-colonial freedom struggle in its last phase was dominated by the Congress, it is difficult to detect any political consensus in this movement beyond its anti-colonialism, as nation was still a space for contestation. There was tension in the ways national freedom was being conceptualised by myriad groups of people who constituted the grand nationalist coalition. Multiplicity of ideological positions and variety of interests—often presented as indicators of factionalism—were existential realities of the Congress-led nationalist movement. While some saw in the attainment of political sovereignty the immediate fulfilment of the goals of the freedom struggle, others preferred to expand the meaning of freedom to incorporate also the notions of economic and social freedom for the people. As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, the idea of freedom in India had grown exponentially through encounter with the colonial rule. As the freedom struggle progressed, the issue of individual freedom came to be subordinated to the concept of collective freedom, the nation taking precedence over all other categories, like class, caste or gender (Kaviraj 2011: 75–81). But those other voices could hardly be suppressed and the relationship between those divergent voices and visions with the structures of the new nation-states continued to be the central problematic of postcolonial history.

If Congress was faction-ridden or lacked consensus, so too was the Muslim League, as Ian Talbot (Chapter 3) and Tanveer Fazal (Chapter 12) show in their essays in this book. There were significant divergences of opinion between sectarian, regional and linguistic interests and most importantly between the leaders of the majority and minority provinces and between the north and the east. So at the moment of arrival, freedom had different meanings for different groups of people in South Asia (Bandyopadhyay 2009a). The contest of ideas in the unfinished task of nation-building continued into the postcolonial period; but the question is, where precisely do we locate such continuities as against evidence of epistemological ruptures? What did this process of decolonisation actually mean for the newly liberated people of South Asia? Since decolonisation was a multi-layered and multi-dimensional process, this book can only aim to partially answer these questions.

## II

For the people of the Indian subcontinent decolonisation meant a twin process—Independence and Partition—and different groups of people derived different meanings out of it, depending on—as Gyanendra Pandey argues in his essay (Chapter 2) in this book—which class or community one belonged to or where one was located at that historic moment. For many people in India it was primarily a moment of joy, as freedom arrived after long struggles to get rid of colonial rule. And hence, as Gyanesh Kudaisya shows in his essay (Chapter 1), there were exuberant celebrations in the capital city of New Delhi as well as in different provincial headquarters. Karachi, the recently anointed capital city of Pakistan, was also geared for celebrations, but hamstrung by lack of infrastructure it found the celebrations to be a logistical nightmare. But more importantly, there were many in India who did not share this sense of triumphalist jubilation; for them the joys of freedom had been marred by the pains of Partition. Mahatma Gandhi, then in Calcutta, kept himself away from celebrations and spent the day in fasting and prayer. Among the political parties, the Hindu Mahasabha on the right and the Communist Party of India (CPI) on the left also boycotted the celebrations. One important feature of the experience of decolonisation in India was this sense of mourning imbricated in the feelings of jubilation.

The arrival of freedom was also accompanied by a pervasive sense of anxiety in the minds of a large section of the population. The Partition did not solve the problem of minorities; it created new minorities—the Muslims in India and the Hindus in Pakistan. As large parts of the subcontinent plunged into religious violence, the security of these minorities became the main issue of public life in the successor states. Kudaisya, Pandey and Talbot in their essays show how these minorities suffered from anxieties, as they were subjected to this unprecedented violence, and had to move to an unknown territory with uncertain futures or became refugees in their own land. And it was their experience of displacement that determined their sense of belonging, their status of citizenship in the new nation-states in years to come (see Nair 2011; Roy 2012; Zamindar 2007).

For many in Pakistan, Partition itself meant freedom—freedom from domination of the majority Hindus. As Aitzaz Ahsan once put it, it represented for them 'A Primordial Divide'—no less than '5,000 years old' (Ahsan 2000: 287–88). For such Pakistani nationalists, 'August 1947 represented the realization of a dream—the dream of self-determination . . . in their own sovereign homeland' (Bose 2004: 97). But there were also many other Muslims who would not share this essentialist view, as any consensus among the subcontinental Muslim community, as Mushirul Hasan has argued (1993: 33), was difficult to find even before and not certainly after the Partition. Particularly outside Bengal, as Ian Talbot argues, the League's organisational network was weak, and hence it was less prepared to represent adequately the local and provincial interests in the newly created state of Pakistan. The interests of the Punjabis clashed with those of the Sindhis; the aspirations of the *mohajir*s or refugees from the minority provinces like Uttar Pradesh (UP) and other parts of north India conflicted with the entrenched interests of the locals. Although everyone accepted Pakistan to be a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, there was a significant ideological difference between the mohajirs and the locals: 'One believed in secularism, liberal politics and laissez-faire economics, the other in the establishment of an Islamic state and a state managed economy' (Burki 1999: 29). But then, the linguistic identity of the Bengalis bred a different kind of nationalism that ruptured the bonds of common Islamic identity privileged by the indigenous population of West Pakistan. Moreover, the new state started its life in a condition of geographical absurdity of about 1,000 miles of Indian territory separating its eastern wing from the western part. The purpose of this book is to look at the implications of such diversities of opinion and difficulties of practical conditions for the development of postcolonial histories of the South Asian states and societies.

The diversity of opinion first of all implied a multiplicity of choices and possibilities of alternative models of governance for the new nations. And here the question of continuity and rupture becomes important. As Mithi Mukherjee has observed while discussing the goals of the new Indian constitution: 'Given the inherent complexities of a society like India, the decision on the goal and the modality of how to pursue it had necessarily to be a choice between multiple, competing, and often conflicting alternatives' (Mukherjee 2010: 182). For India, Arvind Elangovan examines in his essay (Chapter 4) the elements of continuity and alternative possibilities through the ideas and career of a colonial bureaucrat Benegal Narsing Rau (1887–1953), who continued to serve as a constitutional advisor to the Constituent Assembly of India. He devised an alternative constitution, which the nationalist leadership rejected; but as Elangovan argues, it was a constitution that 'located concerns of development and good governance at the heart of independent India's constitution by relegating politics to the margins'. This essay is a critical examination of this alternative constitution—a path that was not taken. The new constitution that was ultimately adopted by consensus by the members of the Constituent Assembly, primarily belonging to the Congress, privileged the idea of 'popular sovereignty' as derived from the legacies of the Congress movement (Sen 2007) and provided for 'social justice' to be ensured through the 'Directive Principles', which were to be implemented by an elected legislature, that is, by the politicians (Mukherjee 2010). The new constitution thus provided for a strong state, which was to be guided by the wisdom of its political elite. It provided for a federal structure, but the central government was left with provisions to take over power in a province in case of any emergency, as determined by the central parliament. It sought to establish a secular democratic state, and provided no special protection for the political rights of the minority religious groups. The 'Fundamental Rights' of citizens were safeguarded in the constitutions, but they were not sacrosanct and could be overridden in the name of national security.

Pakistan too opted for a strong state, as initially, the Government of India Act of 1935 was to be adapted with some modifications as the Provisional Constitution of Pakistan, and the power of modification was left in the hands of the governor general (M. A. Jinnah) until 31 March 1949. By that time the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was to draft a new constitution, but this was long delayed. The Provisional Constitution declared Pakistan a Federation, but gave the governor general emergency powers to override the powers of the provinces in a situation of national emergency. The Constituent Assembly was to function as the federal legislature and could amend the Provisional Constitution and pass laws for the entire country through a simple majority. A cabinet form of government was introduced where the prime minister was to be selected by the governor general. But the federal cabinet after its first meeting invited Jinnah—the governor general—to chair all its meetings, thus concentrating in his hands enormous power: 'Quaid's decision was to be final and binding and carried out by the minister(s)' (Afzal 2002: 13). Pakistan thus chose what Craig Baxter has called 'a "Viceregal" system, with ultimate authority vested in one person' (Baxter 2001: 127).

This tradition of centralisation continued during the subsequent constitutional experiments in Pakistan, but at this stage the other main dilemma was about giving Islam a proper place in its constitution. In 1956, the second Constituent Assembly finally managed to draft a constitution that declared Pakistan an Islamic Republic, by ignoring Jinnah's famous speech of 11 August 1947 envisaging Pakistan to be a secular rather than Islamic state (ibid.: 128). But the constitution was essentially a compromise between the secularists and the Islamists. It stipulated that no law passed by the legislature could go against the principles of Quran and Sunnah, but provided no practical mechanism to ensure that. Other than Islamisation the new constitution declared Pakistan to be a federal republic, but in effect established a strong centralised state, with most power concentrated at the centre, and in the hands of the prime minister (Burki 1999: 30–31). Also it established the principle of parity of representation between East Pakistan and the newly created unit of West Pakistan, meaning that the numerically larger population of the East would have equal representation with those of the West (Zafar 2001: 36), thus sowing the seeds for future conflict. But then, within two years this constitution was overthrown by the new military regime of Ayub Khan who came to power through a *coup de'etat* in 1958. Khan introduced a new constitution in 1962, which established a much more centralised Presidential form of government (see for details, Arif 2001: 86).

It was in this emergence of powerful states, which became the main dispenser of social justice and economic development for the citizens, that one can see remarkable elements of continuity of ideas and structures in postcolonial South Asia. Mithi Mukherjee has argued that in this arrangement, as in the previous colonial one, 'the people themselves were merely passive recipients of the beneficence of the state rather than agents of their future' (2010: 199). But we also need to acknowledge that in India the legislatures, which were to be the repositories of popular sovereignty, were to be elected through universal adult franchise. This was a remarkable improvement over the limited electorate of the colonial arrangement of the 1935 Act. In April 1950 the Representation of People's Act was passed giving voting rights to all citizens above the age of 21. As Ramachandra Guha mentions in his essay on the first election of 1952 (Chapter 5), 176 million people got the voting right; 85 per cent of them were illiterate. Nehru and other nationalist leaders were uncertain about the wisdom of introducing universal adult franchise to a largely illiterate electorate, but the results made them jubilant as Congress now got a massive mandate to shape postcolonial India according to its own preferred model, although in a first-past-the-post system it had got only 45 per cent of the votes while securing 74.4 per cent of the seats in the central parliament (Guha 2007: 146). Thus the electoral system clearly represented a major rupture with the previous colonial system where even under the most liberal of reforms of 1935 only 10 per cent of the adult population had received voting rights under the high property and educational qualifications.

By contrast, Pakistan chose to stick to the bureaucratic rather than parliamentary form of government and delayed election that might change the composition of the Constituent Assembly which acted as federal parliament. As Talbot argues, for understanding the evolving political system in Pakistan we need to keep in mind the migrant nature of its political elite. The central government here was run by migrants—mainly from eastern Punjab—who were yet to build their political bases in the new country. While the mohajirs from East Punjab controlled the central government, the Urdu-speaking mohajirs from UP who dominated the affairs of the Muslim League in pre-independence India were yet to find new constituencies. Their resettlement, that could potentially upset the existing political demography of the state, therefore became a bitterly contested issue. There were also the political and demographic imbalances between the eastern and the western parts of the country. Under the circumstances there was a marked reluctance to go for democratic elections and a greater tendency to rule through 'non-elected bureaucratic authority'.

It is not surprising therefore that democracy had a hard time in the subsequent history of Pakistan. For the first 23 years Pakistan did not have an election. The first Constituent Assembly was dissolved in 1954, but in 1955 the second Constituent Assembly was elected indirectly by the provincial assemblies (Waseem 2002: 269). The 1956 Constitution established the principle of democracy, and an election was supposed to be held in early 1959. But before that it was overthrown by the military *coup de'etat* of Ayub Khan who established a strong centralised civil-military bureaucratic state. When Jinnah died on 11 September 1948, his mantle had fallen on Liaqat Ali Khan, who was less capable of controlling the warring political factions, paving the way for the coming of the military regime, which was indeed 'greeted with a sense of relief by a large segment of the population' (Burki 1999: 31).

But electoral democracy alone does not eliminate all possibilities of authoritarian power. In India, as Dipesh Chakraborty argues in his essay (Chapter 6), while electoral democracy was allowed and even celebrated, popular democracy or the right to civic protest, which was the essence of Gandhian *satyagraha*, was frowned upon in the name of discipline. The citizens of independent India were eligible now to voice their protest once every five years through the ballot box. The Constitution of India, which enshrined democracy on the one hand, also provided for authoritarian power, distinctly following a colonial tradition, which the political elite frequently used to maintain the integrity and security of their nascent state.

In the Nehruvian frame of things, development and social justice would be ensured through a planning process overseen from above by a Planning Commission under his personal tutelage. As Nehru put it in a 1963 article in *Foreign Affairs*, the purpose of the Indian state was to achieve 'political democracy and economic justice'. The first election had already proved that India was 'the largest functioning democracy in the world'. In terms of economy, he wanted to strive for 'socialism', 'without adhering to any doctrinaire definition of the word'. This meant effective planning through the democratic process for extensive land reforms, industrialisation and construction of various infrastructural facilities, like power plants, transport projects, irrigation dams (Nehru 1963: 455–56).

However, as Benjamin Zachariah has argued in his essay (Chapter 7), the idea of planning that we come across in the First Five-Year Plan (covering the period 1950–51 to 1955–56) goes back to the discussion within the Congress in the 1930s, but more directly to some post-war colonial reports, such as the 'Second Report on Reconstruction Planning', and the 'Bombay Plan' drafted by a group of Indian capitalists, both published in 1944, as well as a few minor reports commissioned by the Interim Government after the war. While the pre-independence Congress planning discourse, because of the compulsions of a populist freedom struggle, focused on 'socialism' as its shibboleth, the subsequent postcolonial plans had to devise methods that could effectively adapt this ideal to accommodate the main features of capitalism. In view of the closeness between the capitalists and the Congress in the late colonial period, once again prompted by the imperatives of freedom struggle, it is not surprising, as Zachariah argues, that the Government of India adhered more to the ideas contained in the 'Bombay Plan'. Its connections with socialism, as a result, became more tenuous than substantive from the very beginning.

In India of 1947, the only other alternative plan of development could come from the CPI, but it was immersed in deeper ideological crisis created by the Partition and communal strife. In 1942, the CPI had adopted its 'Adhikari Thesis' on 'Pakistan and National Unity', supporting the Pakistan demand put forward by the Muslim League as a legitimate claim of self-determination by a minority (Sarkar 1983: 411–12; Hasan 1997: 113–14). But in post-1946 India, as communal violence grew in intensity, this policy came under increasing scrutiny and many in the party began to foreground the question of national unity. But the leadership failed to evolve a unified line to adequately address the emergent situation. Their political ambition to unite the Congress and the League in a united struggle against a retreating colonial regime in this last phase of freedom struggle ultimately ended in what Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh have called 'an exercise in absurdity' (Joshi and Josh 1994, 3: 335). The mass upsurges of the 1940s—the Tebhaga, Telangana and Punnapra-Vayalar movements—quickly dissipated, except only the Telangana insurrection. And then, as T. J. Nossiter has argued, the political scenario in post-Partition India changed so fast that it put the CPI leadership completely off guard. With no directive forthcoming from Moscow, the leaders sincerely believed that there was a real revolutionary potential in the unfolding political situation in Telangana, and thought that it could be the way out of their current political impasse (Nossiter 1988: 16–17, 128–29).

The result was the Second Party Congress in Calcutta between 28 February and 6 March 1948, where it adopted its 'Political Thesis', which formally declared that the transfer of power had been fake, and the national government that came into power on 15 August 1947 was indeed the major enemy of the Indian people and therefore needed to be replaced through armed insurrection. As Javeed Alam has argued in his essay in this book (Chapter 8), the Indian communists believed that a 'class-based mobilisation directed against the state . . . [was] enough to transform the outlook of toiling people into revolutionary consciousness'. In short, the 'Telengana way' would soon be the 'Indian way', and that would be the best antidote for communal politics. But by focusing only on the bourgeois state as their primary enemy, Alam argues, they neglected the society and its structures and values. As a result it had a 'non-hegemonic conquest', meaning the people who joined these mass upsurges were insufficiently converted into a socialist consciousness, and hence as these movements declined or were suppressed, they reverted to their old values. In the absence of a fundamental transformation of mass consciousness, the communist alternative remained unfulfilled when the CPI returned to parliamentary democracy in 1950. The prevalence of three or four alternative ideological positions within the party also led to successive splits in the party, the origins of which can be traced in the ideological dilemmas in the first decade of independence.

For Pakistan the existential problems and political options were somewhat different, as it started from a position of basic disadvantage, being rendered almost economically unviable by the absurd logic of partition. As Ian Talbot has shown, with the majority of industrial establishments located in India, it was practically doomed to become an agricultural backwater. And not only that, it was separated from the markets for the agricultural raw materials it produced. While West Pakistan produced raw cotton, the cotton mills were mostly located in Ahmedabad and Bombay; while East Bengal produced most of the raw jute, all the jute mills were in West Bengal. Pakistan did not get its fair share of the assets of British India. It was allocated 17.5 per cent of the assets, but the bulk of it was held back because of the animosity created by the Kashmir conflict, and Mahatma Gandhi had to give his life for trying to persuade the Government of India to give Pakistan what was its due share according to the agreement of December 1947. As M. Rafiq Afzal has argued, 'Pakistan's economic survival in the first year was no less than a miracle' (2002: 17). And this dire economic condition was further compounded by a steady flow of refugees. The 1951 census revealed that there were about 7 million refugees in the state and this far outnumbered the evacuees who left for India. The situation began to improve from the first budget of December 1947 and the creation of the State Bank of Pakistan in July 1948 (ibid.).

However, the so-called economic 'miracle' of Pakistan that followed was largely due to the advent of the Cold War in 1949 and Pakistan signing a defence agreement with the US. Large-scale American military and economic aid started arriving from 1951, and this arrangement was formalised through the Mutual Defence Agreement of 1954. The First Five-Year Plan (1953–57) 'proved to be an entirely unfeasible plan', and the whole process was soon to be overtaken by the promulgation of Martial Law in October 1958. Thus, in the initial years of its existence, lacking any consistent development strategy or any fundamental structural reform, Pakistan developed an 'aid-dependent' economy (Zaman 2002: 159–62) enhancing the power of a civil-military bureaucracy. The coup finally established the hegemony of the Punjabis who constituted 80 per cent of the army. And not just that, there was now a growing imbalance in developmental trajectories for the two halves of Pakistan, with the East experiencing a far lower growth rate, giving rise to the allegation of 'inner colonialism' or 'two-nation economy' (Jaffrelot 2002: 20). Besides the language issue and Bengali nationalism discussed here, this lopsided economic development was another reason for the subsequent secession of Bangladesh. Governed by a powerful Punjabi-mohajir elite, it was not surprising that in the initial years Pakistan's domestic politics would revolve round 'a strong nationalism directed against India' (ibid.: 7) over issues like Kashmir and sharing of the water of the river Indus. And this was further heightened by the beating up of Islamic nationalism that was expected to stitch up a fragmented nation divided along ethnic, linguistic and regional lines. This will be discussed in more detail later.

## III

While the Partition of British India had created two nation-states on the basis of religion, neither was ethnically—or even religiously—homogenous, and this raised serious questions about citizenship and nationhood. The Partition had thrown a major challenge for the majoritarian Hindu nationalists of India, politically represented at this stage by the All India Hindu Mahasabha. Having demanded *Akhand Hindusthan* (united India) and then supported the division of Bengal, they were in a serious ideological dilemma as their traditional Other, the Muslims, were no longer threatening in post-Partition India. And this ideological crisis was exacerbated by the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by someone who many suspected had political connections with them. The political backlash that it faced first made it withdraw temporarily from politics, but then initiate an internal debate to ideologically re-position itself as a more open democratic opposition party. Here, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's essay (Chapter 9) shows, there was a distinct alternative possibility of a more universalistic right-wing opposition party emerging in India's political horizon, opening its gates to members of all religions. But that liberal possibility was effectively killed by the Hindu conservatives, who took control of the party and expounded the ideal of an exclusivist Hindu *Rashtra* (state). And if Jan Sangh, formed by the ideological dissidents who left the Mahasabha at this stage, initially adopted a more universalistic approach to the issues of nationhood and citizenship, after Shyama Prasad Mookherji's death it too came under the wings of the more exclusivist Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.

The question of minority rights however continued to dominate political discourse in India, and here the contribution of Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, and the Chair of the Constitution Drafting Committee, added other dimensions, that is, of caste and class. Before the 1940s, as Anupama Rao argues in her essay (Chapter 10), he had defined the Depressed Classes—later called the Scheduled Castes (SCs)—as a minority based on their material conditions and civic disabilities. Thus, in addition to religious identity recognised by the colonial regime, he established a new criterion for defining minorities. But while he shifted the focus to class, he did not ignore religion either as he strongly argued that the SCs were distinctly separate from the Hindus, and for them in representational democracy he demanded a separate electorate as 'a fall-back option' in the absence of universal adult franchise with reserved seats. If the political project of a separate electorate was unsettled in 1932 due to Gandhi's intransigence, as the Chair of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Ambedkar secured universal adult franchise with reserved constituencies for the SCs. The question of social justice in representational democracy thus continued to remain tied with the question of caste, not only through this electoral arrangement, but also through the abolition of untouchability in Article 17, and adoption of the 'compensatory discrimination' policies.

But Ambedkar's frustration remained, as he failed to reform Hindu society through his proposed Hindu Code Bill, and decided to renounce Hinduism and embrace Buddhism as a profound political statement made just before his death. For the Dalits (or oppressed)—as the Scheduled Castes increasingly began to call themselves in postcolonial India—Ambedkar's legacy continued in what Rao calls 'the longer-term politicisation of untouchability as the paradigm for understanding extreme social inequality'. And this was reflected in the politics of symbolic representation of Dalit interests in India's emerging democratic polity through various competing outfits as the Republican Party of India (formed in 1956) and their later contenders, the Dalit Panthers, who made Ambedkar the symbolic site of making Dalit subjecthood in postcolonial India. Caste thus continues to be a site of discourse on social justice and representational democracy in contemporary India.

On the other hand, for the dominant religious minority of colonial India—the Muslims—Partition brought different problems and challenges in the immediate post-Partition period. In the case of Pakistan, as we know, the religious nationalism based on common allegiance to Islam that provided its foundational principle was fraught with contradictions posed by the linguistic nationalism of the Bengalis. And this contradiction, as A. H. Ahmed Kamal argues in his essay (Chapter 11), became self-evident as early as the day of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on 30 January 1948, that is, in less than one year after the foundation of the new state. The two very different kinds of responses that Gandhi's assassination evoked in West and East Pakistan reflected, in his opinion, the fact that religious nationalists in the East had started re-evaluating the foundational ideology of Pakistan. From here the Language Martyrs' Day on 21 February 1952 was not very far; the weakening of the Muslim League and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 were the natural corollaries of this postcolonial fragmentation of the Muslim ideological consensus that might have appeared on the eve of Partition.

Tanveer Fazal in his essay (Chapter 12) gives a further critical glance at this issue of ideological consensus and discusses how Islamic nationalism in Pakistan was being used as a political glue to hold together a nation that had from the beginning significant ethnic, linguistic, regional and geographic diversities. Despite near religious homogeneity, the Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baluchs and the Bengalis—representing different linguistic and regional identities—had little in common except Islam to gel together as a nation, and hence the state-sponsored project to construct a national identity around its Islamic self. However, this attempt to essentialise Muslim identity also brought in the attempt to homogenise its linguistic practices by making Urdu, the language of Islam, the state language in 1952. This led to the secession of the Bengali-speaking East and the foundation of Bangladesh in 1971 on the basis of near total linguistic homogeneity. Yet, Bangladesh too was not an ethnically homogenous nation, with the presence of a significant tribal population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, who represented and soon articulated a strong non-Bengali identity. And not all Bengali Muslims were secular, as soon Bangladesh too witnessed the re-emergence of Islamic nationalism. Hence the struggle to forge homogenous nations by suppressing minority identities and voices continued in Pakistan and Bangladesh—the two predominantly Muslim successor states of British India.

In India the Muslim political elite had to adopt different strategies of survival as a 'minority', as the Indian Constitution although it sought to establish a secular state did not provide for any special protection of their political rights. But the postcolonial Indian Muslims, as Hilal Ahmed argues in his essay (Chapter 13), were not a political monolith. Foregrounding the cultural and regional diversity of the Muslims of India in the 1950s, Ahmed shows how the existential realities of new India had imposed on them a compulsion to give up their earlier position of representational exclusivism and adopt different strategies in different parts of India, depending on the regional demographic and political situations. They grappled with the realities of representational politics sometimes by aligning with mainstream political parties and sometimes by seeking informal representation. In other words, in post-Partition South Asia, we find more ideological re-positioning and realist adaptation in Muslim political trajectories rather than a seamless continuity of the colonial past.

In neighbouring Sri Lanka—then Ceylon—which gained independence in less than six months after India on 5 February 1948, there was less problem of communal antipathy, to begin with. As Harshan Kumarasingham shows in his essay in this book (Chapter 14), decolonisation in Sri Lanka did not involve any mass movement or partition of territory or ethnic violence. It was a peaceful, gradualist, entirely constitutional 'model' transfer of power, ensured through negotiations between an outgoing colonial government and a Westernised inter-communal indigenous elite under a charismatic leader, D. S. Senanayake. Yet, in less than a decade the island nation-state came to be torn by ethnically exclusivist politics garnering mass support in representational democracy, ultimately leading to violent riots and civil war.

Kumarasingham argues that the seeds of this discord were embedded in the system evolved through the decolonisation process itself, the dominant theme of which was continuity. Not only were the colonial personnel retained after independence, Sri Lanka got a constitution that was drafted by colonial constitutional committees (Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 and the Soulbury Commission of 1944) and not by any elected constituent assembly. The constitution thus inherited at independence introduced the British Westminster system, with universal adult franchise long before India had it. But like the Indian constitution, it too provided no political safeguards for the nation's minorities. While the veneer of ethnic harmony was successfully maintained during the charismatic premiership of Senanayake of the United National Party (UNP) in the 1948–52 period, the more exclusivist form of Sinhalese–Buddhist nationalism was invoked by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party to win the election in 1956. The Sinhalese–Tamil ethnic conflict became a reality after his government passed the Official Language Act No. 33—better known as the Sinhala Only Act—of 1956. The resultant ethnic riot of 1958 was only the beginning of a long history of conflict between the majority Sinhalese population and the minority Tamils that ultimately culminated in the Civil War of 2009. The first decade of transition was thus crucial for understanding the subsequent fractured historical trajectory of the island state.

If another political alternative was at all possible in Sri Lanka, transcending communal and ethnic boundaries, it could be offered by the Communists. The Communist parties were gaining grounds in both British India and Ceylon in the last phase of colonial rule. Indeed, Senanayake urged the British to expedite the transfer of power in Ceylon by citing the growing menace posed by the communists. As Kumarasingham shows, in the election of 1947 the Communists were effectively marginalised by the UNP that moved on to grab power. Nevertheless, they remained in an ethnically torn nation the only political party that continued to appeal to all constituencies across ethnic boundaries. But they were decisively weakened and like other political parties, came under the influence of powerful political families.

## IV

This book thus seeks to interrogate the concept of decolonisation in South Asia by showing that it was a complex and diverse process of continuity and change, fraught with multiple alternative possibilities.

It was an unending dialogue between the colonial past and an evolving postcolonial present. What we call here the transitional politics that emerged in the wake of the twin event of Independence and Partition in South Asia had two distinct features. First and foremost of these was a pervasive sense of anxiety. There was the anxiety of the minorities about their sheer physical survival, their fluid sense of belonging to any nation and the future of their citizenship. The majorities too had anxieties about the future trajectories of their nation-states, as there were multiple alternative pathways open to them. Old nationalisms were interrogated, new identities were born, as fresh boundaries were drawn, both geographically and socially. The debates that marked the discursive terrains of the anti-colonial struggle continued beyond the temporal barrier marked by the formal transfer of power and assumed new complexities and dimensions. And what happened in the first decade of Independence was also indicative of what would happen to the postcolonial nations in foreseeable future.

If there was continuity, it was palpable as much at the ideational level as in the structures—it is often difficult to separate the two domains. It is also difficult to isolate the evidence of continuity from that of change. Often where the structures of government were changed, the principles of governance continued to be those inherited from the colonial regime. The reverse was true as well. It was never a clinical break, nor an uneventful continuity. It was a complex process of transference and adaptation through which the young nation-states were shaping their postcolonial histories differently. This present collection of essays does not venture to capture all its nuances; nor is its geographical coverage comprehensive. It only seeks to take the discussion of decolonisation away from its current preoccupation with event history to a more socially grounded analysis of its long history.

# PART I

# INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

CHAPTER 1

# *Azadi*, *Batwara* or *Vibhajan*

## What Happened on 14–15 August 1947 in the Indian Subcontinent?

Gyanesh Kudaisya*

> Historical processes are seldom so discrete and tidy as to be captured and contained by dates
>
> —Dipesh Chakrabarty 2007: 1.

## INTRODUCTION

'Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greetings . . .'. When the Bombay-born author Salman Rushdie crafted these words in his celebrated novel *Midnight's Children* to signify the countdown to the midnight ceremonies that heralded the advent of Indian independence, he was drawing upon an imagery about the meanings and memories of the events of 14–15 August 1947 which is powerfully embedded in the popular imagination in the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, textbook histories in both India and Pakistan give a prominent place to this historic landmark in terms of signifying the end of British colonial rule and their emergence in the international arena as sovereign nation-states (Chandra et al. 1988; Jeffrey 1981).

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* This essay is an abridged version of a more extended discussion of the meanings and memories of 14–15 August 1947 which was originally published as '"The Enigma of Arrival": 14–15 August 1947 and the Celebration of Independence' (Chapter 2), in Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, London: Routledge, 2000. The author is grateful to Anthony Low, Tai Yong Tan and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay for their encouragement and help.

Not surprisingly, South Asian historians have looked upon it as a twentieth-century turning point, the moment of 'fulfilment' of a historic movement 'comparable in its sweep, its complexity and its consequences to the Russian Revolution of 1917, or the emergence of a revitalized China in 1949' (Kumar 1983: 1).[1] These textbook accounts typically focus on the official ceremonies that marked the transfer of power, the stirring speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah on the occasion and the unprecedented celebrations, which took place across the towns and cities of the subcontinent. They also talk about the 'tragedy' of partition and mention in passing the mass violence and large-scale suffering of the uprooted. Moreover, such events are largely described in terms of the 'birth pangs' of the 'Nation'.

Yet, outside history books, the memories of the coming of independence remain deeply etched in peoples' minds. It is ironic that these memories are mostly not about the 'events', which are celebrated in textbook histories but about individuals and family circumstances, their hopes and fears, and about the anxieties which many people, especially from the 'minority' communities, felt about the future. Such remembrances are characterised by enormous diversity and in attempting to reconstruct the happenings of 14–15 August 1947, one is struck by the 'epic' quality of the 'events' and the sheer futility of narrating them within a single frame as has been done by the history textbooks which locate these events within the narrowly framed univocal narrative of the 'Nation-State'. The ceremonies and rituals of 14–15 August 1947 were experienced by millions throughout the subcontinent.[2] It is possible to vividly recapture, although only partially, the moods and emotions of people who participated in these events or witnessed them by drawing upon a range of sources such as autobiographical accounts, newspaper reports, memoirs and oral history narratives. There also exist representations of these events in the literature of at least half a dozen Indian languages, besides English, as well as in films and other visual media. From a mere exploration of these, one is struck by the fact that the meanings and memories of the events are constructed quite differently from the narratives that history textbooks convey. It is now well recognised that to an overwhelming number of people across much of the northern part of the subcontinent, the event signified *vibhajan* or *batwara* (division, partition) rather than the coming of *azadi* (independence). In the more than six decades, which have since elapsed, this bi-polarity in the reconstruction of the event has been accentuated. The official Independence Day ceremonies, which take place every year in India and Pakistan, commemorate the moment of the birth of the Nation.[3] With the raising of the flag and the singing of the anthem, the ceremonies in both New Delhi and Islamabad remind the citizens of the sacrifices of the 'Freedom Fighters' and urge them to realise the lofty vision of the 'Founding Fathers'. In this sense, state rituals have served to perpetuate only one aspect of the momentous events of August 1947. In doing so they have effaced the range of meanings and memories of the events that lurk in popular memory. In contrast, studies of partition carried out from the 1990s onwards, which draw upon oral histories, have captured memories of individuals, families and communities about the events of 14–15 August 1947 in which the overpowering sentiment remains, not so much of azadi, but of *batwara* or *vibhajan* or partition or division.[4]

This essay makes a modest attempt to reconstruct the momentous days of 14–15 August 1947 by adopting a 'slice of life' approach to look at how the occasion was experienced by common people. The discussion begins by looking at how the state ceremonies and rituals for Independence were planned. The different ideas about how to organise the events are considered, as also the contentious discussion about the notion of 'celebration' itself. The widely different perceptions of the approaching event are described. The discussion then focuses upon the experiences of those who participated in the consecration rituals performed to mark the birth of the 'Nation'. Here the attempt is made to capture the moods and sentiments that then prevailed in the different capital cities of Delhi, Karachi, Calcutta and Dhaka. There appear significant differences in the ways in which different groups and communities in the subcontinent celebrated the event. This essay shows that perceptions of what this historical landmark signified were determined by the location, both physical and social, of the individuals concerned. The case is made that there was more to the events of 14–15 August 1947 than can be refracted through the bipolar categories of *azadi* and *batwara* or *vibhajan*. An attempt is made to unravel the complex and ambiguous meanings attached to these terms. In doing so, emerge divergent voices which present contested visions of independence, nationhood and citizenship.

## PREPARING FOR THE 'APPOINTED DAY'

We could begin this discussion by first looking at how the state ceremonies were planned by high British officials in New Delhi in close consultations with the 'inheritors'—the top leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. The action began in New Delhi in Viceroy Louis Mountbatten's secretariat. As the pages of his tear-down calendar ran down and the 'appointed day' approached, the attention of Mountbatten's staff turned to planning the official ceremonies to mark the transfer of power.[5] By early July 1947, their plans had evolved and the details for the key events were being finalised. On 18 July, the Viceroy reported to London that 'progress has been made on the plans for official ceremonies on the transfer of power'. In his final week as the last British Viceroy of India, Mountbatten's calendar included a day-trip to Karachi on 14 August for the transfer of power ceremonies in Pakistan and similar inaugural ceremonies in Delhi about which he was much more enthusiastic (as he was being sworn in as the first Governor-General of independent India). How these ceremonies were to be organised and the form each of these was to take became clear as close consultations took place with Congress and Muslim League leadership. For instance, Mountbatten reported the Pakistani leadership's request that on 14 August, 'as Ramzan will still be on, Jinnah has asked that I should stay to a State Dinner, so that I will defer my departure'.[6] The Viceregal staff had to deal with questions of constitutional propriety as well as delicate matters of protocol.

In planning the ceremonies, a specific assurance that Mountbatten secured from the incumbent leadership was that 'the Ceremony of substituting the new Dominion flag for the Union Jack will not be performed'. Further, it was specifically arranged that 'the Union Jack over the old Lucknow Residency, which has never been lowered by day or night, will be hauled quite unostentatiously at sundown on 14th August and sent home'.[7] Then, there were several details of nitty-gritty that needed to be sorted out. For instance, there was the issue of the alteration of the King's Title by omission of the term 'Emperor of India' and his signature to be 'GR' and not 'GRI'.[8] As these were sorted out over the weeks, London conveyed its approval of the plans generally, and agreed to send a message on behalf of the King for the occasion.[9] Further, it was agreed that 'similar ceremonies will, however, not take place at Residencies in the Indian States where they exist'.

This was not surprising, given the ambiguous position of the Princely States and the question of how people in these states might take part in the ceremonies being organised throughout the subcontinent. Ian Copland has shown that there existed great uncertainty within the Princely States in terms of their 'integration' with either India or Pakistan. He notes that, 'contrary to popular belief, Mountbatten did not achieve anything approaching the "full basket" of accessions'. On the eve of independence, a number of states across the subcontinent, including Hyderabad, Kashmir, Indore, Jodhpur and Rampur, had failed to declare their intentions. The sense of disquiet that people in these parts experienced over their uncertain future could well be imagined. As a consequence the rituals of independence, as they had been planned for the rest of the subcontinent, could not be observed in these areas (Copland 1995).

In working out the details of the New Delhi ceremonies, the Viceroy held close consultations with Jawaharlal Nehru and his Congress Party colleagues. It was arranged that there were to be three ceremonies with their rather distinct meanings and symbolism: a midnight ceremony at which the Indian Constituent Assembly would meet in a special session to declare that it had assumed responsibility of government in Free India. Then, a ceremony next morning where 'a Proclamation will be made by the Governor General . . . to the assembled Constituent Assembly . . . and a message from H. M. The King would be read'. Finally, an inter-services parade that evening planned as an outdoor event to enable the citizens of Delhi to participate in the celebrations. These three key ceremonies set the format, which was adopted by those in charge of organising the celebrations in the provincial capitals and other cities. 'It is intended that ceremonies in the Provinces will be on much the same lines as those at Delhi and Karachi, Provincial Governors reading the King's Message'.[10]

In their dealings with Congress leaders for planning the official ceremonies for the Indian dominion, the Viceroy and his staff came up with vexing problems of astrology. Mountbatten complained that:

> The astrologers are being rather tiresome since both the 13th and 15th have been declared inauspicious days, whereas 14th is auspicious. I was not warned that I ought to consult the astrologers before fixing the day for the transfer of power, but luckily this has been got over by the CA deciding to meet before midnight on the auspicious 14th

> and take over power as midnight strikes which is apparently still an auspicious moment.
>
> One or two of the more superstitious members of the Cabinet wished to have all the ceremony done at midnight in the Durbar Hall, but as, fortunately, the older members of the cabinet usually go to bed at 9 0' clock. Sleep won the swearing-in battle over Superstition; and we are now going to have the swearing-in ceremony in the presence of 500 people at 8.30 on the morning of the 15th, after which we will all proceed to the CA which I am to address in their new capacity as the LA of India.[11]

There were other awkward matters too, such as Mahatma Gandhi's decision to stay away from all state ceremonies. Mountbatten complained that the Mahatma's absence was 'intentional', as he 'has never given the 3rd June plan his unqualified blessing'. In view of his well-publicised opposition to partition, his participation in any form of celebrations might be 'difficult'. Further, according to Mountbatten, Gandhi also 'realises that it would not be possible to fit him into the programme in the way to which he would feel himself entitled'.[12]

Although the planning had been initiated by Mountbatten's staff, the question of preparations for the 15 August 1947 ceremonies came up during the 14–31 July 1947 session of the Constituent Assembly (CA).[13] Given the Congress Party's commitment to the ideals of democracy and republicanism, it was natural that Congress leaders wanted the CA to be the focal point of the transfer-of-power ceremonies, rather than the persona of the Viceroy. Nehru had been very concerned that the ceremonies should not be hijacked by Mountbatten to become a grand finale of imperial ritual for which he had a great distaste. On past occasions, he had heaped bitter scorn on imperial ritual, condemning the British for 'their court ceremonies, their durbars and investitures, their parades, their dinners and evening dress, their pompous utterances'. One way to ensure that the key ceremony had a genuine *nationalist* quality to it was to site it away from the Viceroy's House which Nehru had previously depicted as the 'chief temple where the High Priest officiated'. He assailed the capitol complex in New Delhi itself which provided the setting for the ceremonies as the 'visible symbol of British power, with all its pomp and circumstance and vulgar ostentation and wasteful extravagance' (Irving 1981: 295). Nehru and other Congress leaders, therefore, insisted that the key ceremony should take place, not at the Viceroy's House, but at the Council House, in keeping with the democratic spirit of the occasion. In the words of Robert Grant Irving, the architectural historian of New Delhi, 'this monument embodied as none other could the fact of India's progress towards constitutional maturity'; it was appropriate that 'from a gallery in the great central hall of that very building, a bugler clad in simple cotton khadi would sound a sonorous note on a seashell, a haunting knell for empire and a summons to self-government' (ibid.: 311).

Away from imperial official circles, political parties like the Congress and the Muslim League were bracing themselves to mobilise the ground to ensure a befitting popular reception to the coming of freedom. The Congress leadership, for instance, gave much thought to how the ceremonies were to be organised: on 21 July 1947, the Congress Working Committee met at Harijan Colony in New Delhi to work out its plans. The Committee called upon 'the people to celebrate Aug 15 in a fitting and solemn manner'. It characterised the 'ending of British rule in India as an event of historic and world significance which opens the doors of freedom and opportunity to our people and which will have far-reaching consequences in national and international affairs'. 'At last', the Committee proclaimed, 'the dawn of freedom' was at hand 'for which people have suffered and laboured for generations'. There was also an expression of regret

> that freedom has come in a manner which does not bring full joy to it, for it is accompanied by the non-accession of some parts of the country and the breaking up of the living unity of India which nature, history and tradition had fashioned and which was firmly tied up with the idea of freedom.[14]

Congress cadres were instructed to work closely with the district and local authorities to ensure that events went off in an 'orderly and punctual' manner. The cadres were warned that 'at this time attempts are being made to vitiate the atmosphere':

> It is a matter of pity that when real responsibility is coming into our hands, some short-sighted people are misleading the public

> and creating obstacles *precisely* at the moment when *the permanent foundations of the nation and nationhood* are being laid.[15]

It was regretted that people were being 'excited by communal propaganda and sentiments'. The Congress circular urged:

> We have to celebrate 15th August in such a way that people's psychology is *metamorphosed* into that *befitting the citizens of an independent nation* . . . our destiny now lies in our own hands. We now have to build a strong and prosperous nation. We have to establish a democratic polity . . . We have to remove the gross inequities . . . and eliminate poverty and unemployment. We have to empower the people . . . All these aspirations and expectations cannot be fulfilled overnight.[16]

In contrast to the sense of organisation and disciple with which the Congress approached the event, the preparations being made by the Muslim League were *ad hoc* and less organised. This was to be expected, as Congress cadres were gearing themselves towards inheriting the mantle of an established imperial order, whereas the Muslim League leadership was confronted with the challenge of enacting rituals of consecration in territories which were in the process of seceding from India. Their preoccupation in the weeks preceding the event had been with securing the sinews of the state itself. Nothing illustrated this more than the sheer problems of logistics involved in establishing the new national capital in Karachi. In the light of such uncertainties, the Muslim League leadership could only issue broad guidelines for the celebrations. On 2 August, Liaquat Ali Khan, in his capacity as the general secretary of the Muslim League, declared: 'It is up to every citizen and organization to devise their own ways of celebrating according to their means, circumstances and available facilities'. He urged the Pakistan 'National Flag' to be flown on all government buildings and private dwellings and places of business. He proposed meetings and processions but appealed, in the same spirit as shown by the Congress leaders, that legal restrictions be followed and ban orders not violated.[17]

However, a flag for the new Dominion had not yet been adopted! Less than ten days prior to the inauguration of Pakistan, Muslim League cadres did not know which flag they were expected to hoist.

In the last week of July 1947, the Sind Minorities Association had proposed a design of a flag for adoption by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. It consisted of three diagonal strips: the central one, which was the biggest, was green with a superscription of crescent and a star indicating the central place of Muslims in the new nation. On top was placed a red band with the superscription of *Om* representing the Hindu 'minority'. The third white strip at the bottom stood for 'other minorities'. The entire flag was embossed with a full-sized balance 'signifying justice and fairness to all the people of Pakistan'.[18] However, on 6 August the special correspondent of *Dawn* based in Delhi claimed to have authoritatively learnt that 'the design of the flag of Pakistan has been finally chosen'. It was to be a 'dark green rectangular flag in the proportion length to breadth of 3:2 with a white vertical bar at the mast, the green portion bearing a white crescent in the centre and a five pointed while heraldic star'. Further, it was specified that the 'size of the white portion being one fourth the size of the flag, nearest the mast, the remainder three fourths being dark green'.[19] The green and the crescent were traditional symbols of Islam, while the vertical white band on the hoist side symbolised the role of religious 'minorities'. According to Akbar Ahmed (1997: 172), the flag's design is a 'symbol of softness, mystery, magic, romance, compassion, hope and promise'. It was only a week later when the Pakistan Constituent Assembly had met in Karachi that the flag was officially adopted, literally hours before the actual ceremonies!

Likewise, the new state did not have a national anthem at the time of its inauguration. Pakistan had to wait for seven years before a suitable anthem was adopted in August 1954. That year after an open competition the poem *Pak sarzameen shad bad!* by Hafeez Jallundhary was chosen as the national anthem. In the light of such uncertainties, it was remarkable that the leaders of Pakistan were able to gear themselves for the ceremonials.

## 'A Day of Mourning!'

While these feverish preparations were being made for the transfer of power ceremonies, there was gathering in momentum a strong public sentiment which questioned the idea of celebration. Those who subscribed to this mood included diverse groups of people. There were, for instance, the 'Nationalist Muslims,' a group of Muslims who were wedded to the 'secular' ideals of the Congress and who had trenchantly opposed the partition demand of the Muslim League. Then, there were the extreme Hindu nationalists who took the view that the coming event signified vivisection of 'Mother India' and was thus an occasion for mourning rather than joy. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there were ordinary people in Punjab and Bengal—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists—who were extremely concerned about what their place would be as 'minorities' in the new nation-states. They were worried about the safety of their lives and property, their right of residence in the new dominions and their status as citizens. Let us consider how some of these groups looked upon the celebrations which were being planned so enthusiastically in Delhi and Karachi.

We could begin with the most organised of the groups who interrogated the idea of commemoration. A major campaign against the celebration plans was organised by extreme Hindu nationalist bodies like the All India Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Their chief ideologue was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a romantic nationalist figure with terrorist links who had spent long years in British jails. He had in 1923 authored the work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* In this text Savarkar had propounded an alternative vision of nationhood that he called *Hindutva*.[20] Of the three pillars upon which his notion of *Hindutva* rested—geographical unity, racial features and a common culture—'the notion of territory was at the heart of Savarkar's ideological construct'.[21] In Savarkar's view, 'a Hindu was therefore an inhabitant of the zone between the rivers, the seas and the Himalayas, "so strongly entrenched that no other country in the world is so perfectly designed by the fingers of nature as a geographical unit"' (Jaffrelot 1993: 26–27).

On the eve of independence, the Hindu nationalists were a substantial political force, represented not only by organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, but by its moderate adherents who were a part of the mainstream Indian National Congress.[22] Within Congress circles, the Hindu right-wing enjoyed sympathy not only at the level of individual leaders like K. M. Munshi, Purushottam Das Tandon and others, but at the grassroots. In Bengal in particular, the provincial Congress had thrown its lot behind Hindu nationalists and there exists strong evidence of the close intermingling at the levels of ideas and organisation between the two.[23] Further, the organisational strength of the Hindu extremists on the eve of independence was growing.[24]

Given this strength, the call by the Hindu nationalists to boycott the coming celebrations was a serious challenge to the Congress. Savarkar, the supreme leader of the Hindu right-wing, openly declared that celebrations in any form were not called for, as 15 August symbolised not independence but the vivisection of the country. The territorial integrity of *Akhand Bharat* ('indivisible India') which had been 'undivided from times immemorial' was now being destroyed. He urged his supporters never to accept partition, or to recognise Pakistan (Keer 1966). Savarkar's call for boycott found an echo among supporters of the Hindu right, growing in numbers due to disillusionment with the Congress over its 'appeasement' of Muslims by 'conceding' the demand of Pakistan.

Throughout late July 1947, as the celebrations plans evolved, the campaign to oppose these also gathered momentum. Its high point was the All India Hindu Convention organised in Delhi on 10 August, during the week the celebrations were to commence. Presiding over the Convention, Savarkar declared that 'Hindus could not rejoice in the coming independence because it meant the establishment of Pakistan over one thirds of India and because untold suffering had been caused to millions of people by the orgy of plunder, arson, murder and conversion' which are likely to result from this policy of 'appeasement'. Nearly a dozen other speakers at the Convention lent support to the demand that India should declare itself a Hindu state and work for Hindu ideals. Savarkar appealed to 'the Hindus irrespective of party affiliations to unite together, look ahead and be ready to face the dangers of partition'. He pointed out that

> the Muslims had already begun to make further claims for a Moplastan, a Moestan and other "stans"; they are also claiming separate districts for themselves in the Hindustan provinces; the Muslim princes are also threatening to establish Pakistans in their own territories; if these threats are not met there will be at least 14 more Pakistans in the country in the next few years.[25]

The only remedy, according to Savarkar, lay in rejecting the vivisection of 'Mother India', and the boycott of the celebrations formed a part of this larger political agenda.[26]

So powerful was the sentiment underlying the idea of boycott that even Gandhi came to be drawn into this larger question. He lent his weight to expressions of doubt about the celebrations by declaring: 'This much I certainly believe that coming August 15th should be no day for rejoicing whilst the minorities contemplate the day with a heavy heart. It must be a day for prayer and deep heart-searching'. In his view there could be no rejoicing if the 'minorities' felt insecure and unprotected.[27] In Lucknow the influential Muslim League leader Begum Aizaz Rasul openly expressed her apprehensions at the state of affairs. She expressly declared:

> There can be no peace in this vast subcontinent unless minorities are safeguarded in both dominions. . . . I feel that no assurances, whatsoever, are forthcoming for the Muslims of the Indian Union, though they have a legitimate and reasonable claim for the safeguard and protection of their cultural, social, political, religious and other rights. . . . This state of affairs will lead to insecurity and frustration, resulting in an anarchic situation for millions of people inhabiting the two Dominions who want to be good citizens of the new States.[28]

In Calcutta, Haji Seth Mohammed Yusuf, a member of the Bengal Legislative Council and Councillor of Calcutta Corporation, painted a 'grim outlook' for Muslims in West Bengal as their future looked 'dark and gloomy'. He complained that no assurances had been given to Muslims about the 'safety and security of their lives, liberties, religion and culture'. He feared that 'on and from August 15th there will be a Hindu rule in West Bengal with a vengeance'. He could see that 'ominous signs are already appearing'; experience of the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946 had convinced him that 'August has not turned out in the past to be a very August month'.[29]

Similar sentiments of apprehension and anxiety were being expressed by Hindus and Sikhs in Sind, West Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). So powerful was the mood against the proposed celebrations that even the Congress President J. B. Kripalani was moved to declare:

> We know that the hearts of all Congress-men and Congress sympathizers in Sind, East Bengal, West Punjab and the NWFP are

> lacerated at the division of the country. They are therefore in no mood to rejoice with the rest of India. Under the circumstances, there is no need to celebrate August 15th in the areas which have been separated from India.[30]

He directed the secretary of the Punjab Congress Committee to instruct local Congress committees in West Punjab not to join in the celebrations. A strong protest was made by Liaquat Ali Khan over the Congress president's statement; Muslim League workers complained that he was undermining the celebrations being planned for the inauguration of Pakistan by giving a boycott call. However, Kripalani refused to withdraw his call for the boycott, although the Punjab Congress circular was withdrawn. He insisted that:

> all those who feel the glow of a free Pakistan must participate in its celebrations. But for those who feel no such glow and are not happy over the division of the country, to participate in the celebrations would be an act of hypocrisy dictated by self-interest.[31]

## THE CONSECRATION RITUALS IN KARACHI

Notwithstanding such doubts and apprehensions, the curtain on the actual ceremonies marking the British withdrawal from the subcontinent was raised on 14 August in Karachi, the newly-designated capital of Pakistan. For Muslims celebrating the foundation of Pakistan, the day could not have been better chosen. As Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, the prime minister-designate, declared:

> Out National State will be inaugurated on a very auspicious day, namely, Jumat-ul-Wida or the last Friday in Ramazan. Therefore the Muslims will have the opportunity of observing the best of all celebrations—offering special prayers after the Jumma prayers, invoking the blessings of God for Pakistan and soliciting Divine grace for all its citizens so that they may prove worthy of the great future which is now theirs. [32]

Many devout Muslims saw it as a particularly propitious beginning for the 'Land of the Pure'.

In areas expected to become a part of Pakistan all attention had been centred on Karachi—the capital-designate—where the ceremonies connected with the transfer of power were to be staged. The city had begun feverish preparations for the historic role it was now being called upon to play—'the greatest moment in the Muslim nation's history for the past 200 years'—as the *Dawn* described it.[33] In July 1947, a special committee steered by the top personnel of Sind provincial government and fully backed by its administrative machinery had been formed to draw up suitable plans for the celebrations. This committee had decided that the entire city was to be decorated with flags and buntings; buildings were to be illuminated and sweets distributed in schools. Even a release of prisoners was contemplated as part of the celebrations.[34] A citizen's committee, chaired by the president of the Sind Muslim League, Yusuf Haroon, had also been formed. Suggestions had poured in and plans were made to create an atmosphere of 'gaiety and solemnity' on that very special day. Efforts had been made to associate the leaders of non-Muslim communities with the work of the Committee; the response, on their part, was encouraging. The Sind Congress leadership, represented by N. R. Malkani and Mukhi Govind Ram, joined the committee and issued an appeal urging all non-Muslims in Sind to participate in the celebrations. 'There must be no sorrowful heart nor hungry mouth on those festive days', they declared.[35] The organisers reported 'phenomenal success' in getting donations from commercial firms, with an 'appreciable predominance of non-Muslims'. The Dalmia Cement Company, for instance, gave Rs 5,000 and a similar amount was presented by Tara Chand Gupta of the Iron & Steel Merchants' Association. There were even suggestions that Muslims were complaining that they were 'not having enough say' in the work of the Committee.[36]

For the residents of Karachi, the new occupant of the Government House was a very special person. The celebrations also marked the homecoming of the city's greatest son, Muhammed Ali Jinnah. His return to the city of his birth, according to *Dawn*, was the end of a journey from a 'cradle room in a nursery to the throne room of the Governor-General's House in the self-same city' which had 'no parallel in modern history'.[37] Karachi eagerly awaited the return of its greatest son in 'his supreme moment of glory'. The raging popularity of the *Quaid* was evident from the varied types of Jinnah cap which were selling like hotcakes, spoiling the buyers with choice: there was 'Jinnah

Popular' made of 'imitation fur' available for Rs 2; then 'Jinnah Jafar' made with 'plush and allied materials' which sold at Rs 10; 'Jinnah Standard' made of 'Indian fur' for the more discerning clientele which sold at Rs 45; and finally, the top-of-the-range 'Jinnah Special' made with the choicest 'Qaraquri fur' priced at Rs 75.[38]

On 5 August an advanced party consisting of Lt S. M. Ahsan and Capt. Gul Hassan Khan, Aides-de-camp (ADCs) to the Governor-General-designate, arrived together with Major McCoy, who was to take charge as Comptroller at the Government House. Within two days arrangements were in place for the arrival of the *Quaid* himself. On 7 August Jinnah, accompanied by his sister Fatima, flew in from Delhi on the Viceroy's personal Dakota. Wearing a cream-coloured silk *sherwani*, a *shalwar* and his trademark fur cap, Jinnah was received by members-designate of the Pakistan cabinet, the Sind premier, the Mayor of Karachi and a Citizen's Reception Committee.[39] Also present were representatives of the Sind Minorities' Association who wished to present a memorandum enumerating their demands to the 'supreme leader' of Pakistan. The enthusiastic crowd of more than 50,000 which had gathered at the Mauripur airfield surged through police cordons when the plane landed, many hoping to catch a glimpse of Jinnah.[40] To mark the 'homecoming', the Sind Government declared a public holiday on that day. Hundreds of cars formed a three-mile procession as Jinnah drove through the streets of Karachi. The homecoming was emotional for Jinnah too. He was presented a Guard of Honour and was attended by scarlet-dressed attendants. Upon entering Government House, he was said to have remarked to his ADC: 'Do you know I never expected to see Pakistan in my lifetime. We have to be grateful to Almighty God for this great gift' (Hamid 1986: 227–28). For the city the celebrations had already begun.

On 10 August Jinnah attended the first public function which was the inauguration of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. Feverish preparations had been underway at the Secretariat to give finishing touches to the refitting of the chamber, previously used by the Sind Legislative Assembly. At what was described as 'a simple and dignified' ceremony, the Pakistan Constituent Assembly held its inaugural session where it elected Jogendranath Mandal, a prominent non-Muslim leader from East Bengal, as its temporary chairman. Calling it 'a momentous occasion', Mandal welcomed all those who had come from different parts of Pakistan to Karachi. These included the premiers of Muslim-majority states like Qazi Nazimuddin of East Bengal as well as important non-Muslim leaders like Lala Bhimsen Sachar, leader of the West Punjab Congress, and Kiron Shankar Roy, a Congress leader from East Bengal. Mandal called upon all citizens, especially from the 'minorities', to be 'responsible, loyal and faithful to the State'. Loud cheers filled the chamber when he came forward to sign the roll as a founder-member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. There was much applause again when Kiron Shankar Roy presented his credentials and signed the roll. In all the Assembly had 69 members, made up of 50 Muslim representatives and 17 Hindu and two Sikh members.[41] The following day the *Quaid* himself addressed the Assembly. In his first speech as leader of Pakistan Jinnah began by defining his priority—'to maintain law and order so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the State'. Created in acrimonious and unhappy circumstances, Jinnah was only too aware that the state which he had worked so hard to achieve should not at its birth be sullied by lingering communal distrust and antagonism. He then went on to warn against 'curses' that the new nation must guard against: bribery, corruption, black-marketing, nepotism and jobbery. Such evils must not be tolerated and should be 'put down with an iron hand'. He urged his countrymen to strive together:

> Now, if we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor. If you will work in co-operation, forgetting the past, burying the hatchet, you are bound to succeed. If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste, or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this State with equal rights, privileges, and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make. (Allana 1967: 409)

He then went on to declare:

> I cannot emphasise it too much. We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and "minority" communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community . . . will vanish. (Ibid.: 409–10)

Then, he came to 'the core of his speech . . . his credo'. He told the citizens of Pakistan in 'a characteristically vigorous fashion':

> You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan . . . You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State . . . We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens of one State. (Ibid.: 410)

In retrospect, these words spoken by the 'Founder of the Nation' at the inauguration of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly seem ironical. Did Jinnah really mean that religion did not matter as far as matters of state were concerned? Then, what was the 'Land of the Pure' all about? Chaudhri Muhammad Ali in his *The Emergence of Pakistan* speculates:

> Could it be . . . that as soon as Pakistan was won the *Quaid-i-Azam* abandoned the two-nation theory and invited all its citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to work together for the state on the basis of territorial nationalism? What then was its *raison d'etre*, and what would be its distinguishing characteristics? Had the two nation theory merely been the scaffolding that was to be discarded once the structure was built? (Ali 1967: 239–40)

Jinnah's speech has been interpreted by scholars in several different ways. Chaudhri Muhammad Ali believes that:

> what is overlooked is that Pakistan came into existence not by conquest but as a result of a negotiated agreement between the representatives of the Hindu and Muslim communities to partition the subcontinent. An explicit and integral part of the agreement was that minorities in both states would have equal rights and equal protection of law. In that context the Quaid-i-Azam was wholly right in asserting the fundamental principle that "we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State". (Ibid. 240)

For instance, Stanley Wolpert, a biographer of Jinnah, seems confounded when he writes in astonishment at the words uttered by his protagonist:

> What was he talking about? Had he simply forgotten where he was? Had the cyclone of events so disoriented him that he was arguing the opposition's brief? Was he pleading for a united India—on the eve of Pakistan before those hundreds of thousands of terrified innocents were slaughtered, fleeing their homes, their fields, their ancestral villages and running to an eternity of oblivion or a refugee camp in a strange land? (Wolpert 1984: 301)

However, several Pakistani scholars believe that Jinnah's inaugural Constituent Assembly speech represented what he really stood for—his 'creed'—which has been suppressed by ruling vested interests, so much so that 'a distorted, censored version' was supplied to Jinnah's official biographer, Hector Bolitho, for a book commissioned by the Government of Pakistan (Cowasjee 1997). The Pakistani scholar Akbar Ahmed has called this speech Jinnah's 'Gettysburg Address'. According to him it was 'an outpouring of ideas on the state and nature of society, almost a stream of consciousness' which reflected the *Quaid's* 'vision for the state he had created' (Ahmed 1997: 173–76). Likewise, the historian Ayesha Jalal has noted that, 'although the speech was promptly suppressed by the official guardians of Pakistan's ideological frontiers, it has served as the *magna carta* for those who . . . style themselves as the true inheritors of Jinnah's political legacy' (Jalal 1995b: 73–89). Jinnah's words seem ironical in view of the direction that Pakistan's polity has taken in the over 60 years of its post-independence history. However, when they were spoken, Jinnah's declaration revealed his vision of the new nation in which he envisaged an equal place for all citizens, irrespective of religion or creed.

Meanwhile, Karachi continued its feverish preparations for the big day. Unlike the imperial capital New Delhi, the city of Karachi hardly had the physical wherewithal or the necessary political resources to assume the role which it was being called upon to play. Even as preparations were underway to mark Pakistan's birth, a government was literally being created overnight in Karachi. Here was a capital city with hardly any government offices, ministries, office furniture or stationery. Typewriters were regarded as a luxury and, in administrative terms, the situation was described as being utterly chaotic (Hamid 1986: 228).

Nonetheless, there was enthusiasm in welcoming the birth of Pakistan. The *Dawn* reported that 'Karachi swarms with pioneers picnicking, with an air of excitement'. The 'Pakistan Specials' brought civil servants from India daily, and were full of people who 'alight in the promised land with vociferous cheer'. The administrative machinery of the new state was slowly taking shape. 'Cabinet Ministers of Pakistan use packing cases as desks and crack jokes with painters who drip white-wash on them' and it was reported that even Government House did not possess a telephone directory![42] When Wilfred Russel, representative of the British firm Killick Nixon & Company, visited the prime minister's house to discuss with him the feasibility of acquiring a fast, long-range Royal Viking aircraft for Jinnah, he found that 'workmen were swarming all over the house unpacking, painting, hanging up curtains and scrubbing floors'. It all seemed quite 'typical of the pioneering atmosphere of Karachi at that time'.[43]

Meanwhile, those expected to arrive for the transfer-of-power ceremonies had begun their journey to Karachi. General Auchinleck, the British army chief and his military secretary, Shahid Hamid, on their way from Delhi, flew over East Punjab and came in very low to watch the columns of refugees proceeding to Pakistan. Hamid recalls: 'We saw areas in smoke that were burning. They were obviously Muslim. Smoke covered the countryside. It presented a grim picture of a battleground'. At Lahore they had met the West Punjab Governor Evan Jenkins, General Peter Rees of the newly formed Punjab Boundary Force and Colonel Ayub Khan who 'did not mince their words and painted a very gloomy picture'. They were told that the Sikhs were behaving with 'pre-medieval ferocity' and felt that the worst had still to come. Hamid arrived in Karachi 'thoroughly depressed after witnessing the carnage of the Muslims which was taking place in East Punjab'. He 'immediately went to the Quaid and Liaquat and told them of the happenings and the gruesome sights' he had witnessed (Hamid 1986).

Not unexpectedly, within Karachi the 'minorities' were growing increasingly apprehensive. Wilfred Russell could observe in the streets that 'the considerable numbers of Hindus who had lived there peacefully side by side with the Muslims for generations, were obviously a bit worried and were beginning to look over their shoulders into India' (Russell 1951: 12–30). The enthusiastic contributions by non-Muslim business groups reflected a certain nervousness, an attempt by propertied groups to secure goodwill in an environment which could suddenly become hostile. On 12 August 1947, Sri Prakasa, a prominent Congress leader from UP and a personal friend of Nehru, arrived in Karachi to take charge as India's first High Commissioner.[44] Within a few hours he was met by Choithram Gidwani, the most prominent Congress leader of Sind. Sri Prakasa, who found the latter 'in an angry mood', recalls:

> [he] asked me what I meant by being there at all? He told me that he had been the President of the Provincial Congress Committee continuously for twenty-five years; and when he was available for the job, no body had any business to come. I must confess I was taken aback; and I told him as quietly as I could, that I was not responsible for my presence, and that he should go to the Prime Minister to know why I should have been sent. (Prakasa 1965: 12)

Quite clearly, both men had little idea of the nature of bilateral ties that the two dominions were expected to establish. It was interesting that Gidwani, who was undoubtedly the most prominent non-Muslim politician in Sind, viewed himself not as a citizen of Pakistan but as someone who naturally should be the diplomatic representative of India in the capital of Pakistan! When Sri Prakasa invited him to celebrations that he had organised at the Palace Hotel to mark Indian independence, Gidwani refused to attend the function. 'He said he was too upset to come to any such functions for freedom, for freedom was not real freedom for which Sind had been sacrificed' (ibid.).

In the evening of 13 August 1947 Mountbatten and his party flew in from Delhi and were immediately driven to Government House for a banquet where 'pleasant, mutually complimentary and felicitous speeches were delivered by Lord Mountbatten and Mr. Jinnah'. This was followed by an outdoor reception. To Alan Campbell-Johnson (1953: 155), Jinnah 'the host and hero of the occasion', appeared to his guests to be 'an aloof, almost lonely figure . . . at this historic moment'. Shahid Hamid, also present at the reception, found him 'quiet and aloof', but he felt 'proud of such a leader. He looked every inch the Father of the Nation and the Founder of the ideological State of Pakistan', he later recalled (Hamid 1986: 228).

That night at one minute past midnight, as 14 August began, Radio Pakistan came on air to announce the birth of the new nation. A recitation from the *Quran* was followed by a hymn sung by Zafar Ali Khan: 'Quaid-i-Azam, we are indebted to you' (Kashmiri 1995: 166). The next morning, Mountbatten and Jinnah were to ride through the streets of Karachi on their way to the Constituent Assembly. However, there had been intelligence reports warning of an impending bomb attack on their motorcade. Jinnah had been alerted to the danger and the suggestion was made that they should either cancel the journey, or at least go in a closed car instead of an open Rolls Royce. However, both disregarded these reports as alarmist fears and decided to go ahead (Campbell-Johnson 1953: 135). The proceedings were carried out according to plan. Right on schedule Jinnah arrived in a state landau and inspected the troops, drawn up in a large hollow square, under the command of their respective British commanding officers. A stately and dignified Jinnah led observers to comment that 'he could have given points in dignity and deportment to the most stately of British Viceroys' (Russell 1951). 'A squadron of Tempests roared in salute' and the parade was 'carried out with a precision and smartness which augured well for the future'. After the inspection of troops Jinnah, undaunted by the bomb threat, proceeded in an open car to the Constituent Assembly with Mountbatten. Gerry O'Neill, a soldier on duty in Karachi during the parade, witnessed the motorcade:

> In the lead car were Mountbatten, looking every bit the "El Supremo" in his naval uniform, with about one square foot of medals and Jinnah. Behind them were Fatimah Jinnah and Edwina Mountbatten. . . . Mohammed Ali Jinnah was . . . completely at ease and obviously enjoying himself, but not gloating in his role as the new Governor-General. His thin, aquiline features were not fixed in a smile, but showed emotion and concern for the occasion. (Ahmed 1997: 23–24).

In the Assembly the ceremony marking the birth of Pakistan was short and dignified. Mountbatten read out the King's Message. He then went on to express the hope that the minorities in Pakistan would enjoy equal rights as citizens and offered the example of the Mughal Emperor Akbar as a model for the new state. However, according to Akbar Ahmed, this suggestion was particularly inappropriate as 'for many Muslims Akbar posed many problems'.[45] 'To propose Akbar as an ideal ruler to a newly formed and self-consciously post-colonial Muslim nation', comments Ahmed, 'was rather like suggesting to a convention of Muslim writers meeting in Iran or Pakistan that their literary model should be Salman Rushdie' (Ahmed 1997: 176). A reply from Jinnah followed in which he reiterated that the tradition of tolerance and goodwill among the Muslims went back to the days of the Prophet himself, rather than the much later example of Akbar. The short ceremony lasting less than an hour ended with everyone congratulating each other (Hamid 1986: 229). Jinnah and Mountbatten then went out in procession to Government House. Enthusiastic spectators lined the streets. Though the bomb threat never materialised, the old Rolls Royce which carried the dignitaries—borrowed from the ruler of a state—caught fire as soon as the occupants disembarked as its engine had overheated (Ahmed 1997: 186). Relieved that they had made the procession unscathed, Jinnah was said to have turned to Mountbatten and said, 'thank goodness I have brought you back safely'.

Outside the Governor's House and the Constituent Assembly, Karachi was in a deceptively festive mood (Royle 1989: 168). Campbell-Johnson, private secretary to Mountbatten, noted while passing along the official route that:

> neither the scale nor the enthusiasm of the crowds was anything like as great as I had expected. . . . the greetings of the crowd, apart from some lorry loads of hilarious soldiers from the Pakistan Navy and the usual excitement of children, were decorous rather than ecstatic. (Campbell-Johnson 1953: 155)

The atmosphere was not 'terribly demonstrative, rather 'provincial' and 'sober', but not ecstatic as in India (ibid.). On the other hand, Shahid Hamid recalls that 'all along the route there was great enthusiasm and wild cheering. . . . A dream was coming true and a State was being born. The name of Quaid-e-Azam was on everyone's lips as well as their thanks to the Almighty' (Hamid 1986: 229). Wilfred Russell, then lodged in the Palace Hotel that was crammed with press people, decided to be out in the streets to 'squeeze every drop of experience out of this great day' (Royle 1989: 58–59). The mood of independence was certainly there, as witnessed by the new green and white Pakistan flags that were sprouting from rooftops, balconies and windows. However, he sensed that most of the 'ordinary people in the street had scarcely realised that Pakistan had really come about'. While everyone knew that the challenges facing the new state were immense, the spirit of 14 August was one of goodwill. Russell had a sense of that as he observed the celebrations in Karachi:

> Sitting on an old Ford surrounded by a cross-section of Indian Muslims, all restrained, yet fervently happy, as far as I could tell, I felt the tears coming to my eyes. It was all so sensible and friendly with real comradeship between the new and the old, real understanding on both sides. Pray God it will last. (Ibid.: 172–73)

In the evening, after Mountbatten and his party had left, the Karachi Club hosted a 'grand independence banquet' where the city's *crème de la crème* jostled to felicitate the *Quaid-i-Azam*. The Club had been established in 1934 by the elite Hindu Amil community, mostly from Shikarpur; the Bohri Muslim community and old, titled Sindhi families. Ken Mac, the well-known musician and conductor who performed at the Cricket Club of India in Bombay, had been flown by a special Tata airlines plane to perform at this special event. Jinnah arrived with his sister Fatima for the banquet and was received by the Club's president Justice Tyabji and its honorary secretary Jethanand Tandon. They were led to the other guests which included cabinet members, the diplomatic corps, the Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Gracey, British civilian and army officers, Pakistani officers like Iskander Mirza, all 'resplendent in cummerbunds or dress suits with the ladies in colourful sarees and evening dresses'. At the sit-down dinner around the teak dance floor they were serenaded by Ken Mac and his band. Haji Bhai Esmail Dossa, a Bombay-based businessman, recalls the highlights of the evening:

> Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah requested Ken Mac to play "So deep is the night" because on that Chopin tune, Ruttie had taken Jinnah's consent for marriage in the Taj Mahal ballroom, at her birthday party, on February 20th, 1918. Later, the Quaid requested the orchestra for Paul Robson's "The End" which as a courtesy to the Quaid, was sung in the tenor voice, by the great Ken Mac himself, for it was known that the Founder used to hum the words of "The End" on Thursday

> afternoons in Bombay that he devoted to visit the grave of his wife Ruttie, in the Khoja Isna'asheri cemetery of Bombay.
>
> The finale of the evening was given to the music "Happy Birthday Dina" because the Quaid had chosen the Independence Day of Pakistan, on the birthday of his only daughter Dina, whom he had left behind in Bombay, with her two children Nusli and Diana. And when the programme ended the Quaid stood up, the guests followed, and everyone lifted their glasses, to toast "God save the King". (Dossa 1997)

Whilst the music played to the august gathering, the mood was changing outside in the streets of Karachi, as news was coming in of the disturbances in Punjab and northern India. The ominous signs were evident for all to see. Campbell-Jones on his return flight to Delhi noticed the 'large fires in the Punjab [as] beacons of ill-omen dominating the landscapes for miles around' (Campbell-Johnson 1953: 156). The uncertainties felt by the non-Muslims who had, for the moment, chosen to stay with the new state tempered the mood of independence in Karachi, as elsewhere in Pakistan. If indeed Pakistan marked the creation of a state for the Muslims, would there be a future in the new country for Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians? Jinnah and his lieutenants had, of course, on every conceivable occasion sought to allay the fears of non-Muslim communities. The Independence Day Celebration Committee had made it a point to include 'minority' members. Constant reminders had been made by leaders that 'minorities' should 'be loyal to their respective states'. In an editorial published in the *Dawn* on 3 August, the newspaper supported the call by Liaquat Ali, prime minister-designate, to observe 15 August as a 'day of deliverance' from foreign subjugation. But the underlying message was for all peoples of the new state to honour their new countries, and not let the 'newly acquired freedom be threatened by violence and blood'. Jinnah's speech on 11 August was the firmest indication yet of Pakistan's commitment to honour the rights and freedom of all its citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Thus the mood in Karachi on 14 August, as the British withdrew from the subcontinent, was ambivalent. For the Muslims, it was a time for rejoicing as the birth of Pakistan marked freedom and the creation of a separate state in the name of Islam. Reactions from non-Muslims were more guarded; they were unsure if the new state would deprive them of their rights. For the moment, they could seek solace in Jinnah's promise that their rights of the 'minorities' in the new state were assured. This feeling was reinforced the following day, when Jinnah attended a Dominion Day Service held in Karachi's Anglican cathedral. In Karachi at 'the first bright dawn of independence', the peace that freedom promised seemed, for the moment at least, to have become a reality.

## 'IT WAS A LOVELY TIME TO WALK IN DELHI'

Meanwhile, the capital city of Delhi had been gearing itself for the coming event, soon to make it the focus of world attention. Representatives of the press from all over the world had arrived to cover the transfer-of-power ceremonies and the British Broadcasting Commission had sent its best equipment and camera teams for the occasion. In the Delhi Municipal Corporation, Muslim League and Congress members had in a rare show of unity resolved to celebrate the occasion together. They had urged the citizens of Delhi to forget 'past bitterness and start a new era of mutual co-operation, communal harmony and a well-knit city life'.[46] Only one member of the Corporation, Ran Singh of the Hindu Mahasabha, had opposed the celebrations as, in his opinion, the motherland was being 'balkanised', and 15 August was a day 'not for rejoicing but of mourning'.[47] Elaborate plans had been made for sprucing up the city, arranging for free distribution of sweets to schoolchildren and specially designed 'Independence Medals' inscribed with the national insignia on one side and '*Jai Hind!*' on the reverse.[48]

While these feverish preparations were being made, the Muslim League, on its part, had make special efforts to avoid any controversy. Several of its leaders had repeatedly called upon the city's Muslim residents to come forward and join the celebrations.[49] Other political groups too had been forthcoming in wanting to participate. For instance, the Communists, bitter opponents of the Congress since the Quit India Movement of 1942, had issued an appeal to the 'followers of the Red Flag, all sections of the organised working class and other sections of the people' to join the celebrations.[50] While there was no Muslim opposition to the proposed celebrations, there had been obvious concerns about the place of Muslims in these. There had also been growing concerns about the safety of the community. Activities of extreme communal organisations, the shifting of key officials in the city's law-and-order machinery and news of violence against the Meos in the bordering south-western districts had caused much fright among the 'minority' community. In the last week of July, the Delhi Muslim League had been moved to appeal for funds for the relief for Muslims who had suffered. It was reported that 150 Muslim villages in Gurgaon district and over 160 Muslim villages in the princely state of Bharatpur had been burnt to ashes and, as a result, almost 25,000 Muslims had been rendered homeless.[51] A large number of them had evacuated to Delhi and were living in temporary shelters on pavements. They offered a sharp contrast to the decorations and arches that were being put up by Congress volunteers, municipal authorities and young enthusiasts. In the prevailing circumstances, the question of celebrations had become a problematic one from the point of view of Delhi's Muslim residents. While their leaders never seriously contemplated the question of boycott—such a move would have invited hostility and even imperilled the safety of the community—there is considerable evidence to suggest that they now waited upon the event with anxiety, if not apprehension.

On the evening of 14 August, a special function was arranged at Rajendra Prasad's residence on Queen's Road 'to give a send-off in the traditional fashion by ladies of Delhi' to Nehru, other ministers and constitution-makers. From Tanjore came priests from the Pandarsannidhi of Thiruvadhurai Adhinam, a special order of Hindu ascetics, who brought 'holy water' which they sprinkled on the leaders. Prasad and Nehru sat around a holy fire amidst the chanting of hymns, and women marked their forehead with *mangal tilak* (holy vermillion). It was traditional in Hindu custom to derive power and authority from priests. Nehru yielded to such rituals under pressure from close associates who argued that this was the traditional method of assuming power. The leaders then proceeded to the Constituent Assembly.[52] By 10 pm, huge crowds had assembled outside the building in spite of a spell of monsoon showers which had failed to dampen their spirits. As the leaders arrived to enter the building, they roared in greeting.

At 11 pm, the Constituent Assembly began its special midnight session which was chaired by Rajendra Prasad. The chamber was filled with newly-starched *dhotis* and 'Gandhi caps'. The front rows were occupied by Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and others. Also in the front row sat Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the 'nationalist Muslim' leader, whose 'sad face' appeared 'something of a tragedy, sticking out from the sea of happy faces like a gaunt and ravaged rock' (Syed Mahmud, cited in Douglas 1998: 28).[53] The proceedings commenced with the singing of *Bande Mataram* by the prominent Congress leader Sucheta Kripalani who sang the first verse of the anthem. Thereupon, Rajendra Prasad as president of the Assembly commenced his address in Hindi. He recalled the sacrifices of those who had toiled for freedom. He paid a glowing tribute to Mahatma Gandhi—'our beacon light' who 'represents that undying spirit in our culture and make-up which has kept India alive through vicissitudes of our history'. He then acknowledged the deep sense of sorrow at the partition of the country:

> The country, which was made by God and Nature to be one, stands divided today. Separation from near and dear ones, even from strangers after some association, is always painful. I would be untrue to myself if I did not at this moment confess to a sense of sorrow at this separation. (Prasad 1984: 72–73)

He had a word of cheer for those 'on the other side of the border' whom he urged to 'stick to their hearths and homes'. To the 'minorities' of India he had a word of assurance that they will receive 'fair and just treatment' and enjoy 'full rights and privileges of citizenship' (ibid.: 73). Thereafter, a two-minute silence was observed in memory of the 'martyrs' in the struggle of freedom.

Then came the moment for which the occasion has always been remembered: the midnight speech by Jawaharlal Nehru. In a soft ringing voice, Nehru began speaking words which have since become memorable:

> Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge

> of dedication to India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity. (Nehru 1949b: 3–4)

Nehru went on to speak of how the coming of freedom was 'but a step, an opening of opportunity, to but greater triumphs and achievements that await us'. He then posed the question: 'Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?' He made a brief but pointed reference to the country's partition: 'Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of these pains continue even now.' 'Nevertheless, the past is over', he continued, 'and it is the future that beckons to us now'. The future was one of 'incessant striving' to be able to 'fulfil our pledges' in order to bring about 'the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity . . . to wipe every tear from every eye'. He appealed to the 'people of India' to 'join us with faith and confidence in this great adventure' to 'build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell'.

Writers and historians have marvelled at the eloquence with which Nehru was able to capture the feelings and sentiments of millions. His 'Tryst with Destiny' speech has been regarded as a triumph in oratory, an inspired performance which achieved a unique fusion of 'Man, Mood and Moment'. Nehru then moved a formal resolution urging that all Assembly members take a pledge of dedication when the midnight hour approached. Chaudhari Khaliquzzaman, a prominent Muslim League leader from UP, rose to support the resolution. He and his party colleagues from the Muslim League had absented themselves from the chamber during the singing of *Vande Matram* on grounds that it offended Muslim religious sentiment but had since rejoined the proceedings.[54] In supporting the resolution Khaliquzzaman spoke of the need to be vigilant, as having achieved success in the struggle for freedom, the country was about to embark on 'a new struggle' which is 'not to be fought against any outsider but is to be settled among our own selves'. There lay ahead the challenge of 'framing a Constitution, which would be acceptable not only to the minorities but also to all the people of the country. . . .This is the greatest task' (Constituent Assembly of India 1947: 4–6). When he resumed his seat, there was loud cheering. 'Jawaharlal Nehru came to me direct and embraced me heartily for the sentiments I had expressed', recalled Khaliquzzaman

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(1961: 395). For seconding the motion Nehru had chosen Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a noted philosopher and educationalist, with 'the specific directive that, once he was called upon to take the floor, he should not stop till the stroke of midnight so that the assembly could then proceed to take the pledge' (Gopal 1989: 189). Radhakrishnan took the Assembly through the countdown to the moment of midnight for the historic pledge to be taken. His speech was 'an oratorical time-bound relay race'. His words echoed the sentiments which Nehru had expressed so lucidly:

> History and legend will grow round this day. It marks a milestone in the march of our democracy. A significant date it is in the drama of the Indian people who are trying to rebuild and transform themselves. Through a long night of waiting, a night full of fateful portents and silent prayers for the dawn of freedom, of haunting specters of hunger and death, our sentinels kept watch, the lights were burning bright till at last the dawn is breaking and we greet it with the utmost enthusiasm. When we are passing from a state of serfdom, a state of slavery and subjection to one of freedom and liberation, it is an occasion for rejoicing. (Radhakrishnan 1988: 82)

As Radhakrishnan ended his speech precisely at the twelfth chime of the clock, a conch shell was raucously sounded through the chamber. Nehru rose to administer an oath to members of the Assembly who pledged themselves to the service of the people. Thereafter, the 'National Flag' was presented 'on behalf of the women of India' by Hansa Mehta, a prominent women's activist, who expressed the hope: 'May this flag be the symbol of that great India and may it ever fly high . . . May it bring happiness to those who live under its protecting care' (quoted in *The Hindu* 1947: 8). The singing of 'national songs' followed. The first was Iqbal's famous *Tarana-e-Hind*, whose first few lines *Sare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara*, were sung lustily by all. The ceremony ended with the singing of *Jana Gana Mana*, the chosen national anthem.

Outside the Assembly chamber people were ecstatic. Sham Lal, the veteran journalist, remembers:

> August 1947 was an exciting time; a kind of euphoria had come upon all of us. Delhi was lit up, and we stood around in the streets, waiting

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> for the appointed hour to come. . . . There was a sense of achievement in the air. (Butalia 1997)

Mani Shankar Aiyar, a former diplomat and parliamentarian, was six when his mother took him to watch the midnight ceremonies. Although his memories of that historic night are faint, he was intensely proud 'to have been there at the creation' (quoted in Ward 1997: 56). Khushwant Singh, the well-known writer, who was also present outside Parliament House, remembers the 'tremendous sense of euphoria and great hope for the future' (Dhar 1997: 16). Kapila Vatsyayan, an art historian, recalls 'running from Connaught Place that midnight to Central Hall to cheer that great speech' which was 'a great moment of political consciousness of political freedom' (Anon. 1997: 25). Mulk Raj Anand, the well-known Indian writer, remembers 'the glow of pride' as 'the Tricolour went up' (Anand 1997: 10). People listened with rapt attention to the speeches that were being broadcast to those gathered outside. D. F. Karaka, a journalist, has recalled:

> Delhi's thousands rejoiced. The town was gay with orange, white and green. Bullocks' and horses' legs were painted in the new national colours and silk merchants sold tri-coloured saris. Triumphant light blazed everywhere, even in the bhangi (untouchable) quarter. Candles and lamps flickered brightly in houses that had never seen an artificial light. (*Time Magazine* 1947)

A. K. Damodaran, former diplomat, recalls that 'it was a lovely time to walk in Delhi' (Royle 1989: 216). There were countless people who had tuned in to All India Radio (AIR) to hear in the baritone voice of Melville de Mellow a live relay of the proceedings.

Next morning, on 15 August, the focus shifted to the Viceroy's House where Mountbatten, resplendent in official dress, and his wife Edwina, in a shimmering silver gown, entered the Durbar Hall to a fanfare of trumpets. He was sworn in as the new Governor-General by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He then administered to Nehru the oath of office as prime minister and 13 others were sworn in as members of the new Cabinet. At 9.40 Mountbatten left in the State Coach at the head of a procession for the Constituent Assembly. There he inspected a guard of honour and was received by Rajendra Prasad. The proceedings began with the reading of messages of greetings from foreign countries. Mountbatten addressed the Assembly in his capacity as the new Governor-General. He acknowledged that the 'advent of freedom is tempered in your hearts by the sadness that it could not come to a united India; and that the pain of division has shorn today's events of some of its joy' (Constituent Assembly of India 1947: 16). Rajendra Prasad then spoke and briefly dwelt upon sentiments of sadness that were being widely felt over partition. He went on to outline his vision of a new India in which 'poverty and squalor and ignorance and ill-health . . . the distinction between high and low, between rich and poor, will have disappeared' and urged all countrymen to dedicate themselves to the challenge of nation-building. Thereafter, he invited Mountbatten to give the signal for the hoisting of the 'Tricolour'. A salute of 31-guns was fired and the national flag was unfurled over the Council House.

According to reports, flag-hoisting ceremonies took place at more than 300 places all over the city. Many prominent leaders such as J. B. Kripalani, Shankar Rao Deo, G. V. Mavalankar, N. V. Gadgil, S. Radhakrishnan, Ammu Swaminathan, Syed Hussain and Maulana Azad were the guests at several of these. The Congress cadres were particularly enthusiastic. A 2,000-strong corps of Congress Seva Dal volunteers held a rally at Feroz Shah Kotla which was inspected by Sucheta Kriplani. Students and youth sympathetic to the Indian National Army held a flag-hoisting ceremony at Asaf Ali Park in Daryaganj and took out a flag march through Chandni Chowk. The Delhi Bar Association unfurled the national flag over the district court premises; all kinds of voluntary bodies held their own celebrations. Religious organisations like the Sanatan Dharma Sabha and the Arya Samaj held special pujas and *havans* (Hindu ritual involving fire-worship) at several places. The Christian community too showed much enthusiasm. All churches affiliated to the Church of North India and the Delhi Diocese organised special services, the largest being held at the Cathedral Church of the Redemption. A multi-denominational service was held at St James' Church near Kashmiri Gate. Outside the municipal limits, reports were received of enthusiastic participation. From the surrounding countryside people poured into the capital on bullock carts, horse carriages and trucks. Those who stayed on organised functions in their own villages; at Mehrauli, for instance, Gopi Nath 'Aman' presided over the flag ceremony and at Badarpur, Dr Sukh Dev saluted the 'Tricolour'.

For those who had congregated in the tree-lined streets of Delhi, the highlight of that day was an evening parade organised as an outdoor event to enable the citizens to have a sense of participation. Mountbatten left the Viceroy's House at 6 p.m. in a gold state carriage, descending an undulating 'King's Way' towards Princess Park near the Memorial Arch. He was received by Nehru and the chief of the army staff. Troops drawn from the three armed services formed a hollow square around the saluting base. A ceremonial Guard-of-Honour was presented, with military bands in attendance. Mountbatten inspected the troops, took his salute and returned to the flagstaff where he unfurled the 'tri-colour'. A 31-gun salvo was fired. Troops marched past the national flag and a fly-past by fighter planes which dipped in salute followed. A sea of humanity watched the event and, according to eyewitness accounts, a million people had turned up that evening. As the national flag was unfurled, a rainbow flashed across the sky which many interpreted as an auspicious omen. As soon as the parade ended the principal buildings in the vicinity were illuminated. A fireworks display followed towards the western end of King's Way near the Secretariat complex. Many of the prominent city landmarks such as the Memorial Arch, the Fountain in the old city and the Qutub Minar were illuminated.

People in the streets lit up their homes, places of work, public areas, markets and shops and an atmosphere of festivity was visible. Mountbatten hosted a dinner reception in the Government House that evening. At the banquet Nehru proposed a toast to the King and Mountbatten reciprocated with a toast to the Dominion of India. After the dinner, Shahid Hamid, then on the staff of General Auchinleck, encountered Nawab Ismail Khan, a prominent Muslim League leader from UP, the 'heartland' of the Pakistan campaign. He later recalled:

> I was walking through the Moghul Gardens when I noticed a man sitting on a stone bench, with his head bent, smoking a cigarette. To my surprise I found it was Nawab Ismail Khan in deep meditation. I asked him when he was leaving for Pakistan. Very quickly he said that he would stay in India and look after the people who stood by him and voted for him. He felt that such people needed him more now than ever before. He could not let them down. He maintained that some Muslim leaders must stay behind for there were still too many Muslims in India who were not able to dream of going to Pakistan.

> The simplicity of his statement left me dumbfounded and I admired him all the more. (Hamid 1986: 231)[55]

The next day, on 16 August, the focus shifted to the Red Fort where Nehru addressed a large crowd. An estimated crowd of one million had gathered to see him raise the 'national flag' over the ramparts of the seventeenth-century Mughal citadel. 'We have gathered here', he began, 'on a historic occasion at this ancient fort to win back what was ours. This flag does not symbolise the triumph of individuals or the Congress but the triumph of the whole country'. According to the historian Jim Masselos, this was a highly symbolic act: 'In one swoop he established a new spatial order, a symbolic taking over of space that had been controlled by the former rulers' (Masselos 1988: 45). In his speech Nehru declared that:

> The first charge of the Government will be to establish and maintain peace and tranquillity in the land and to ruthlessly suppress communal strife . . . It is wrong to suggest that in this country there would be the rule of a particular religion or sect. All who owe allegiance to the flag will enjoy equal rights of citizenship, irrespective of caste or creed. (Nehru 1986: 2–3)

Masselos has perceptively alluded to 'the potency in the symbolism of the Red Fort and in its setting'. He notes that its locale established 'references to the imperial grandeur of the Mughals as well as to the flowering of an imperial state system that was indigenous and therefore national'. This served to highlight 'not merely grandeur by association that the Mughal references underscore' but 'also continuity with a past'. In this sense 'the new state was legitimised' as 'locating of the main independence day gathering at the Fort asserts an historical legitimacy to the new nation and implies an identity that does not derive from the British inter-regnum'. Masselos has also unravelled several other symbolic elements such as the memories of the Revolt of 1857 with which the Fort was associated which, in his view, marked a 'redressing of the balance of justice'. Further, Nehru in his speech recalled Subhash Chandra Bose who had 'sacrificed and suffered' and lamented that he 'hoisted this flag in foreign countries and when the day came for hoisting it on the Red Fort, he was not there to see his dream fulfilled'. Masselos notes that by remembering Bose, Nehru made an emotional connection to the Indian National Army whose men he had defended in a trial conducted at the Red Fort a few years ago. Above all, the ceremony signified 'the march to freedom' and 'assumptions of power' (Masselos 1988: 45–46).

However, there is evidence that there were different ways in which the symbolism of the events was being interpreted. For instance, many Muslims viewed the ceremony at the Red Fort in a remarkably different way. For instance, Ashfaq Alam Khan of Meerut captured some of these concerns when he wrote to the *Dawn* to protest against the use of the Red Fort:

> It is reported that the Union Jack on the Red Fort will be replaced by the Congress flag on Aug 15. This historic building of red stone and marble stands on the sandy bank of the Jummna in sacred memory of centuries of Muslim rule in India and is held in high esteem by the Muslims all over the country. The Union Jack which was hoisted after bloody hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Delhi during the Mutiny and which had flown throughout since then will at last be lowered from this memorable fort, and at that hour it is advisable that the over-zealous Congressmen should refrain from playing with Muslim sentiments, especially in the present atmosphere of mutual suspicion and hatred. The flags of both the dominions should be hoisted in the fort or none at all. The Red Fort like other historic buildings is an Archaeological monument and should be placed under joint control.[56]

Two days later, the *Dawn* raised the issue in its editorial. It declared that the plan to raise the flag of the Indian Union on 16 August at the Red Fort had 'caused considerable agitation among the Muslims'. It was noted that it 'would have been far more graceful of the Nehru Government if they had respected deeply the sentiments and desisted from hoisting their flag on this historical monument in such haste'. It sounded a note of caution and warning when it observed:

> We trust that there will be no petty-minded jubilation by the Hindus under the mistaken impression that by hoisting the flag of their state on the seat of power of ancient Muslim Kings they have somehow stretched a spiteful hand back into the historic past and dimmed the imperishable glory of Muslim rule.[57]

In fact, the use of the Red Fort as a site for raising the flag was seen by many as controversial and several Muslim leaders had hoped that such a move would be avoided. For instance, Sham Mohammed Siddique, an honorary magistrate in Delhi, had suggested to the authorities that the 'national flag of Hindustan' should be hoisted on the band-stand at Connaught Place, and that the 'unfurling ceremony should be performed by a prominent Muslim'. Likewise, in the memoirs of Chaudhari Khaliquzzaman, there is lament at the state of 'Delhi of the Mughal emperors in 1947' (Khaliquzzaman 1961: 396). Similarly, Begum Shaista Ikramullah recalls that 'for millions of people like myself', Delhi was 'synonymous with Muslim culture' (Ikramullah 1963: 135–36). Perhaps such concerns over use of the city's most prominent indigenous building reflected a deeper sense of unease that the ceremony on 16 August caused to Muslim sentiments?

In the evening of 16 August, the Red Fort witnessed a brilliant display of fireworks. Over half a million people observed a spectacle which included dazzling items like 'Searchlight' and 'Waterfall by Moon Light' which the organisers proudly claimed were 'purely made with Swadeshi stuffs (sic!) and with Hindustani skill'.[58] While there were many who were ecstatic at such glittery expressions of joy, there was present within the city a significant Muslim population that perhaps took a somewhat different view of what was happening. How did they respond to such extravagant exhibitions of joy? Were they apprehensive about their place in these celebrations, their right of residence, the safety of their families and homes, and their status as citizens of the new nation? And to add to their sense of nervousness and foreboding, there were already present in Delhi, on the eve of independence, an estimated 100,000 refugees, those who had taken asylum in the capital to escape violence. According to reports, thousands were pouring in every day—Hindus and Sikhs from different riot-affected areas in the NWFP and West Punjab as well as Muslims from districts of East Punjab and the Princely States of Alwar and Bharatpur.[59] The city's rationing authorities had been inundated by requests for ration cards while civic authorities feared the outbreak of a public health crisis.[60] The refugees provided a stark counterpoint to the burst of fireworks and collective expressions of joy which dominated the celebrations in the capital.

## BEYOND CAPITALS

We may perhaps look beyond the capital cities to get a better sense of how other places across the subcontinent perceived the events of 14–15 August. The example of Dhaka enables us to do so. In the city of Dhaka, where the East Pakistan Government was trying to establish its base, a sense of unease prevailed. An atmosphere of uncertainty seemed to have enveloped the 'minority' communities there. Although there had been no confirmed reports, the air was rent with rumours of a 'considerable flight of capital'; of properties being sold; and of an impending 'mass exodus'. One especially worrisome rumour doing the rounds was that with the establishment of Pakistan on 14 August, all Hindu properties would automatically pass into the hands of Muslims.[61] Anxieties mounted even further when news broke out that all Hindu government employees had elected to serve the Indian Union and would thus soon be leaving. As they already had an assurance from the Premier of West Bengal that they would be accommodated in the new province, the 'minorities' feared that the city police force would be devoid of a single Hindu police officer.

The widespread sense of anxiety brought together influential Hindu public figures in Dhaka to hold a convention at the Narayanganj Bar Academy to demand protection of the 'minorities' and other steps to 'keep up the morale of the people'. They demanded from the Indian government guarantees of help 'including the conferment on the "minority" of East Bengal the right of citizenship in all areas within the Indian Union'.[62] Another meeting later in the week was held at the Rupmahal cinema hall under the auspices of the Dhaka Congress Committee. Taking note of the panicky situation, Congressmen decided to tour rural areas to allay fears, to form 'strong volunteer corps', and called upon all non-Muslim members of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly and the East Bengal Legislative Assembly to reside in their respective constituencies to 'restore confidence'. However, the sense of panic persisted. By early August, money deposited in banks and commercial houses was being withdrawn in large amounts.

Politicians in East Bengal attempted to allay the panic. On 30 July, a large public meeting had been jointly organised at Mymensingh by the Congress and the Muslim League. Appeals had been made to Hindus to stay as well as to the Muslims not to permit the 'minorities' to leave because of 'foolish acts of aggression' but to seek their 'co-operation in the development of the state of East Pakistan with its poor resources'. Those present had included S. M. Ghosh, president of Bengal Congress, and Moulvi Sharifuddin Ahmed, chairman of the district board. The latter had assured that the new state would be governed on principles of justice and equity and that Hindus and Muslims would have their separate personal laws.[63] Likewise, the Hindu Mahasabha also organised a convention at the University Hall. Its leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had demanded that Pakistani authorities make constitutional provisions to safeguard the 'political, religious and economic rights' of the 'minorities'. He had wanted the Government of East Bengal to explicitly declare that it had no intention to confiscate capital or properties belonging to non-Muslims. Mukherjee had advised only those Hindus to leave their homes where they were 'hopelessly small in number and to migrate to other places and form pockets'. Hindu landowners were to give land for setting up such pockets; women were to be removed from places where 'their honour might be in danger' and students were asked to give up their studies for a month to go to villages and 'help in maintaining the morale of the rural people'.[64] On 2 August the Dhaka Central Peace Committee had met to take stock of the situation. It reiterated Jinnah and other League leaders' assurances to the 'minorities' that there was no cause for panic.[65]

Such had been the mood in Dhaka when plans for the Independence Day celebrations were being worked out. A 12-member Committee had been appointed by the Bengal Muslim League to organise the inaugural celebrations of Pakistan and to welcome the East Bengal Government to the city. Khwaja Habibullah, the ex-Nawab of Dhaka, had been appointed president of the Committee.[66] Meanwhile, the Bengal Congress had sent out its own specific instructions on how celebrations were to take place in East Bengal. It had directed for the joint hoisting of the Congress flag and the flag of Pakistan. In other matters the initiative had been left to local leaders. All bans on meetings and processions were to be respected and all situations of conflict to be avoided. Celebrations were to be voluntary and no compulsion was to be exercised. It was, it said, 'advisable to cancel the celebration altogether rather than give opportunity for any unhappy incident'.[67] Four prominent Congress leaders, including J. C. Gupta, a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, had been deputed to help the local Congress at Dhaka with regard to the celebrations.[68]

Further clarifications followed with Kalipada Mukherjee, secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, who made it clear that the 'minorities' 'as loyal citizens of the State in all private houses on any day of State celebration as on the 15th they should give due recognition to the State Flag'.[69] On 15 August 'Pakistan Independence Day' was marked in Dhaka with the hoisting of the flag by Khwaja Habibullah, ex-Nawab of Dhaka, at the historic Lalbag Fort, an old Mughal palace. Pakistan flags were hoisted on government buildings, many of which were decorated. In a number of Hindu localities, the Congress flag flew alongside the new Pakistan flag. Decorated arches named after prominent 'martyrs' were erected at many places. The official ceremonies went off smoothly and no untoward incidents were reported, except one instance of pulling down of a Congress flag.[70] On the same day the swearing-in of the new government took place at Curzon Hall. Justice Akram, Chief Justice of the East Bengal High Court, administered the oath of office to Sir Fredrick C. Bourne, the new Governor. Also sworn in were the new Premier, Khwaja Nazimuddin, and two of his ministers—Nurul Amin and Hamidul Huq Chowdhury. The speeches made at the ceremony alluded to the great responsibilities that lay ahead. Sir Fredrick spoke of East Bengal as a 'young province' in which 'many difficult, many urgent problems will present themselves'; he continued, 'you have the advantages of youth, enthusiasm, energy and high ideals'. Nazimuddin stressed the magnitude of the tasks that awaited the new government and assured the 'minorities' of 'honorable and generous' treatment. The ceremony concluded with recitations from the Holy Quran and the unfurling of the Pakistan flag by the Governor.[71]

On 16 August, there took place a public meeting at Victoria Park where Khwaja Nazimuddin unfurled the Pakistan flag. He spoke of communal violence as a 'thing of the past' now that freedom had come. The common rejoicing by members of different communities for independence had filled his heart with 'great hope' and convinced him that confidence was being restored. He further assured the 'minorities' of a 'fair and generous deal'. So confident was he that he was prepared to withdraw all cases, collective fines and to release those convicted in communal affrays, if representatives of Hindus and Muslims jointly put forth the demand. However, he warned that 'he had no Aladin's lamp or a magic wand to transform the country'. Nazimuddin's speech was followed by officials and leaders of opposition parties. B. Das

Gupta, Chairman of Dhaka Municipality, assured the co-operation of the 'minorities' and warned that freedom could not be retained if there was any oppression of the 'minority' community. Leela Roy, leader of the Forward Bloc, assured the co-operation of her party; D. N. Barori, ex-minister, extended support on behalf of the Scheduled Castes' Federation and Nepal Nag spoke for the Communists. In a broadcast later in the day from the Dhaka station of the Pakistan Broadcasting Service, Nazimuddin expressed similar sentiments and asked all Muslims to work in unison and invoke the blessings of God for the tasks that lay ahead.[72] Following the meeting, a procession was taken through the main streets. Starting from the Chowk it passed through Moghultully, Mitford Road, Islampur Road and Johnson Road, and many participants raised slogans such as *Azad Pakistan Zindabad*, *Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad* and *Hindu-Muslim Bhai-Bhai*. The procession ended at Victoria Park.[73]

From all accounts it appears that the ceremonies in Dhaka, which had been a backwater in the Muslim League campaign to establish Pakistan, had been confined largely to the staging of state rituals marking the establishment of Pakistan and the assumption of power by a new government. The element of popular participation, evident so strikingly in other places, was noticeably missing. In retrospect, one could see that events in Dhaka did not go beyond signalling the city's affirmation of Pakistan and its own place in it as a part of that territory.

## 'MAHATMA'S MIRACLE'

Several hundred miles away in eastern India, Calcutta was in a different mood on the eve of independence. It had suddenly become the focus of attention as Mahatma Gandhi had arrived in the city 'to rescue it from the danger of communal violence'. When Gandhi had decided to abstain himself from the state rituals being staged in New Delhi, he had hoped to be in Noakhali in East Bengal—a riot-torn area where he had for several months concentrated his energies for bringing about 'Hindu–Muslim unity'. However, as a result of unexpected circumstances, he now found himself in Calcutta. For almost a year since the 'Direct Action' day killings of 16 August 1946, Calcutta had been living through a nightmare. For months the city had more than its fair share of communal animosity with violence erupting frequently.

The bitterness and hostility was, to a large extent, compounded by the uncertainty about the future of the city, as rival claims had been made over it before the Radcliffe Boundary Commission in the preceding months. In the context of the Bengal region, Calcutta had become the epicentre of the boundary disputes. Although the population of the city had a clear Hindu majority, the Muslim League had made an impassioned plea to the Boundary Commission to have Calcutta included in Pakistan.[74] As independence drew near, the signs were ominous: Calcutta was on the verge of a civil war and any spark of trouble on independence day could well trigger it off.

Faced with such circumstances, the leaders of the provisionally divided West and East Bengal knew the urgency of the tasks that lay in the run-up to independence. It was not so much planning and organising the celebratory events; rather the utmost had to be done by Muslim League and Congress leaders to prevent the occasion from slipping into an ostensible demonstration of communal victory by one group over the other. In their concern for not wanting the independence day celebrations to become an occasion and excuse for communal clashes, Muslim League and Congress organisations in Bengal had issued injunctions to their followers, reminding them to be sensitive to the feelings of 'minorities' during the celebrations. The Bengal Congress circulated instructions to its district committees, particularly in North and East Bengal and in Sylhet district, which were expected to go to Pakistan, that they should hoist the Congress flag, and the Pakistan state flag alongside.[75] While no one was to be forced to take part in the celebrations, the Bengal Congress Committee urged its supporters to make special efforts to maintain 'an atmosphere of communal amity'.[76] Likewise, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League issued its own directions on how independence day was to be observed in East Bengal. The Pakistan national flag was to be hoisted on all houses and buildings. A special prayer was to be offered to invoke the blessings of Allah on the new state of Pakistan, and processions were to be taken out at various places. Jinnah, however, ordained that, while Muslims need not sing the *Vande Matram*, they should 'continue enthusiastic participation in the celebrations'.[77]

Notwithstanding the appeals and expectations of the political parties, the situation on the ground remained as tense as ever. Muhammad Usman, secretary of the Calcutta Muslim League, complained that despite hopes that the coming of independence would bring about a return to peace and normalcy, the city was still in a disturbed state, with the Muslim 'minority' bearing the brunt of 'Hindu hatred'. In a press statement he pointed out that 'life [in] the city [was] far from satisfactory' and 'disturbances [were] continuing unabated, with minorities . . . forced to leave their hearths and homes'.[78] At a meeting on 10 August, Maulana Muhammed Yahya, president of Calcutta Muslim League, claimed that hundreds of bustees in Calcutta and Howrah had been 'destroyed by bombs, firearms and arson' and that several hundreds of Muslims had been made homeless.[79] Women and children had been the targets of attacks by Hindu mobs, and several of their places of worship had been defiled and demolished.[80]

Propaganda that the new West Bengal administration was bent on an anti-Muslim policy had begun to gather ground. The glaring absence of Muslim officers from the administrative structure, including the Calcutta police force, gave rise to the charge that a Hindu *raj* was being created in West Bengal. This was seen as a manifestation of the feeling among Congress leaders that they had established a great communal victory over the 'minorities' of Calcutta, who must be treated as their vanquished enemy to be crushed and totally annihilated.[81] The Muslim 'minority' in Calcutta had lost faith in the ability, indeed the willingness, of the West Bengal administration to provide protection and security to the community. For them, the prospects of survival in Calcutta after independence appeared grim. Given the situation, the Calcutta Muslim League threatened that if such state of affairs persisted and the safety of Muslim life and property remained threatened, it would give a call to the Muslims of Calcutta not to join in the celebrations of independence, but instead to mark the day by silence, as a black day of mourning.[82] They promised, however, that the Muslims would not oppose nor obstruct the official celebrations, and there would be no violence or demonstration on their part; the protest would be carried out in a peaceful and dignified manner.[83]

Such was the atmosphere of communal rancour and bitterness in Calcutta that greeted Gandhi when he arrived in the city on 9 August on his way to Noakhali. His coming was regarded by several Muslim leaders as a godsend. Fearing that they would be at the mercy of the 'majority', come Independence Day, they begged Gandhi to stay on—to use his personal presence and moral influence—'to pour a pot of water on the raging fire' that was consuming the city.[84] Shaheed

Suhrawardy, leader of the Bengal Muslim League and the man whom many Hindus blamed for precipitating the massacres of 'Direct Action' day in 1946, flew from Karachi upon hearing of Gandhi's visit to be able to persuade the Mahatma to stay on until peace could be restored in the city. Gandhi was at first reluctant, claiming that there were more pressing needs in Noakhali. However, the anxieties of Muslims and the tense situation convinced him that he was needed there, and he agreed to stay for a few days. However, he imposed two conditions. First, he wanted the Muslims in Calcutta to assure him that they would do all they could to maintain peace in Noakhali. He elicited from their leaders a promise that they would send telegrams to their co-religionists in Noakhali to stop them from taking any action against the Hindus there (Payne 1971: 533–34). This was agreed to, with the added promise that personal emissaries would also be sent to Noakhali to keep peace at the first signs of trouble (ibid.). Gandhi further insisted that Suhrawardy stay by his side throughout his stopover in Calcutta to work for 'Hindu–Muslim unity' and to show that both the Congress and the Muslim League were working together towards peace. When both these conditions were met, Gandhi took up residence at Hydari Manzil at 151, Beliaghata Road in a filthy, predominantly Hindu district. Not far from his house was Miabagan, a Muslim slum, which had recently been raided by young Hindus armed with home-made grenades and sten-guns borrowed from former soldiers (ibid.: 534).

When he heard the woes of Calcutta and tales of the 'recital of man's barbarism' it made his 'head hang in shame'. He was told that although there were more than 23 per cent Muslims in Calcutta, there were parts of the city which were inaccessible to the Hindus; that the Hindus had begun to feel that they were free to retaliate now that Muslim policemen and officers had almost withdrawn and been replaced by Hindus; and that the 'wretched spirit of communalism' had entered even the police force.[85] Gandhi's worst fears seemed to be coming true. He had been from the outset, as is well known, opposed to the vivisection of the country. He had vehemently challenged Jinnah's 'two-nation' theory, arguing that India was not a nation but a civilisation. He had always maintained that the idea that the Muslims and Hindus constituted separate 'nations' and should have their own states was 'preposterous and impractical' (Parekh 1997: 20). He pointed out that even if the subcontinent were to be divided on the basis of religious nationalism, the new state of Pakistan would have to include a large number of Hindus, just as millions of Muslims would be left in India. The solution lay not in division but in finding a way of accommodating the 'minorities'. Despite Gandhi's tremendous moral influence at the time, there was little he could do to overcome a communal estrangement that had become so deep that it ensured that 'all well-meaning constitutional schemes collapsed without a fair trial' (ibid.: 21). In the end, the only acceptable alternative was the much-dreaded alternative of partition. When the Congress Working Committee had decided to accept the 3 June Plan, accepting the 'inevitability' of the country's partition, Gandhi had declared that he would not stand in the way of a decision that had been collectively made, although he disagreed with it. He could see that 'impatience with independence' had driven the Congress to accept the 'evil of partition'.[86] He had on that occasion cautioned:

> . . . should the evil I apprehend overtake India and her independence be imperiled, let posterity know what agony this old man went through thinking of it. Let not the coming generations curse Gandhi for being a party to India's vivisection.[87]

Gandhi had resisted partition because the idea, according to him, rested on the inherently evil principle of religious nationalism, 'denying a thousand years of Indian history', with its traditions of plurality, diversity and tolerance (Parekh 1997: 21). More importantly, he feared that partition would only generate more anger and bitterness between Muslims and non-Muslims which would lead to violence and bloodshed. But because the bulk of the Congress leadership accepted partition, Gandhi had acquiesced in it.

Having accepted the decision, Gandhi interpreted it in a different way. He had taken it upon himself to persuade the people not to look upon the act of partition and the creation of Pakistan with revenge and anger. He portrayed it as the splitting up of a Hindu joint family. As family members could not live together, they were free to set up separate households to avoid constant quarrels. But separation did not mean that these family members should hate and kill each other and deny their common history (ibid.). Repeatedly, at prayer meetings over the months, Gandhi had exhorted his listeners not to consider India and Pakistan as two separate countries; the division of land, which was a physical and political act, should not lead to a division of hearts.[88] As long as men's hearts remained true, he urged, they could behave as if there had been no partition of the country.[89] He regarded, in particular, the division of the armed forces as 'an error and a terrible mistake', for it would not lead to mutual peace between the two countries, but was likely to generate mutual fear and mistrust and cause future conflicts.[90] He could accept that India and Pakistan would be two separate states, but never to him would they be two different nations.[91]

Yet Gandhi knew, all along, that he was working against heavy odds.[92] The passions had been aroused to such intensity that violence and bloodshed seemed imminent to him. The signs were everywhere: in Lahore Hindus were evacuating in large numbers; elsewhere in northern India 'the pent-up emotions of hundreds of thousands of people were being expressed in acts of casual violence' (Payne 1971: 532). In Calcutta he could see that 'young blood is boiling' (Gandhi 1995: 351). As soon as he had taken residence in Hydari Manzil, he had a taste of the undercurrents of rage. As he entered the place he was met with 'cries of traitor and a shower of bottles and stones' (Green 1993: 377–78). Angry Hindu youths accused him of coming to Calcutta in defence of Muslims. The angry crowds demanded to know why he had not gone to places where Hindus were the victims. They accused him of being a traitor who was interested only in the Muslims and asked him to leave Beliaghata. Patiently, Gandhi remonstrated with the angry deputations that continuously came crowding around the house. Speaking in well-attended prayer meetings, he asked for tolerance; he argued that although India was getting independence soon, it would not become free unless all its communities could live in peace beside each other. Gandhi's presence allayed somewhat the anger amongst the Hindus, but it was clear that many were still resentful. Their anger dissipated, however, when Suhrawardy, during a public speech on the eve of independence, admitted that he had been responsible for the killings on 'Direct Action' day. The admission, according to Gandhi, was the turning point and had a 'cleansing effect' (Gandhi 1983, 89: 43).

The calming influence that Gandhi exerted by his sheer presence in Calcutta was beginning to have its impact. With Suhrawardy by his side, he seemed to have dissipated the anger of the Hindus as well as allayed the fears of the Muslims. On the eve of independence day, the mutual hatred and anger that had prevailed in Calcutta for nearly a year seemed to have evaporated. People started venturing onto the streets, evidently encouraged by the surprising absence of violence, and the whole city suddenly took on a holiday mood, with plenty of demonstrable amity between the two communities.[93] News soon reached Gandhi that over 5,000 Muslims and a similar number of Hindus were marching in peace through the city (Payne 1971: 536).

It was a matter of some pride that Gandhi had managed to bring sanity into the city on the occasion when the dream to which he had dedicated his life—the independence of India from colonial rule—was about to be realised. Yet, he confessed that as India's freedom and her day of deliverance from 'foreign yoke' drew near, he was filled with a sense of foreboding and all that he saw was darkness everywhere (Polak and Lawrence 1949). He knew that at the hour of independence, India would be subjected to the supreme test, as that freedom would contain the seeds of future conflict between India and Pakistan.[94] He would not celebrate, but would mark the occasion with a day of fasting, spinning and praying. He invited everyone to embark on a 'twenty four hour fast and prayer' and to spin 'as much as possible'. On the night of 14 August he went to bed as usual, refusing to await the countdown to the midnight ceremonies. 'At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom': when Nehru uttered these famous words, the 'Father of the Nation' was fast asleep, having deliberately forsaken the glitter of the state rituals being staged with pomp and ceremony in New Delhi.

The next morning on 15 August, Gandhi's thoughts were filled with sorrow; five years ago on that very day Mahadev Desai, his secretary for 25 years and the 'tallest' of his disciples, had passed away suddenly while in detention at the Aga Khan Palace. Gandhi had personally lit his funeral pyre.[95] His spirits lifted when he saw that the goodwill and peace achieved on 14 August spilled into Independence Day. Calcutta was wrapped in a friendly atmosphere and ecstatic scenes of togetherness were witnessed in the streets which were jammed with people out to celebrate and chant exuberantly, '*Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai!*' and '*Long live Hindustan and Pakistan!*' (Payne 1971: 537). Gandhi's home at Beliaghata saw a stream of visitors throughout the day: Hindus, Muslims, the new Governor C. Rajagopalachari, the new West Bengal cabinet headed by Prafulla Ghosh, students and Communists. Gandhi advised the new government to be humble and forbearing and to 'beware of power'. He asked them not to be 'entrapped by its pomp and pageantry' but to always remember that they were in office 'to serve the poor in India's villages' (Gandhi 1995). A large congregation awaited him in the evening at his prayer meeting at Rash Bagan Maidan to which he insisted on walking. He congratulated the city on the fraternisation that it was witnessing on that day. Muslims and Hindus were, he noted, meeting in 'perfect friendliness'; they all shouted the same slogans and flew the same 'tricolour'; Hindus were being admitted to mosques and Muslims to Hindu mandirs. Gandhi was reminded of the days of the Khilafat movement: 'if this exhibition was from the heart and was not a momentary impulse, it was better than the Khilafat days' since, he said, both communities had 'drunk the poison cup of disturbances' and the 'nectar of friendliness should, therefore, taste sweeter than before'. Gandhi hoped this heralded the end to disturbances and that Calcutta could, henceforth, be 'entirely free from the communal virus' and offer an example to other parts of the country like the Punjab.[96] The widespread scenes of celebration in the streets and the mood of the day amazed those present in the city. The American Consul in Calcutta who witnessed many of the events pointed out that 'in view of the delicate balance which had existed only a few hours before' the transformation that had come about was 'miraculous' and was 'in no sense an overstatement'.[97] He noted:

> With the advent of independence, communal peace in Calcutta was miraculously restored. Fraternisation on the friendliest basis and on a tremendous scale erased overnight a full year's heritage of murder, death and destruction has completely transformed the city and the outlook of its people. . . . the whole city was in a holiday spirit. . . . Dominion flags appeared from nowhere to be flown on every building, bus tram and automobile and many demonstrations of amity between the two communities which only a few hours previously had been engaged in cutting each other's throats were witnessed everywhere. . . . Gandhi is widely credited with being the wizard responsible for the magical transformation of Calcutta. Vast public meetings are held in Calcutta and vicinity practically every day, at which, after the conclusion of his prayer meeting, Gandhi gives his views . . . The attendance at these rallies is tremendous; one is believed to have attracted half a million people.[98]

Mountbatten publicly commended his efforts in a broadcast, waxing lyrical about his miraculous 'one-man boundary force who kept the peace while a 50,000 strong force was swamped by riots'.

Meanwhile, the key event symbolic of the British withdrawal from Calcutta took place with an unusual burst of popular fervour. This was at the Government House where a flag-raising ceremony and a ceremonial farewell to the British Governor Sir Frederic Burrows had been scheduled on the morning of 15 August. In attendance were 'all the city's great and near-great'. Such was the popular enthusiasm that the crowds overtook the place. The American Consul recalled that a 'rabble broke out to take over the Government House, infiltrating into every nook and cranny'.[99] All arrangements broke down and the crowds simply took over the palatial building—one of the grandest examples of colonial architecture in the subcontinent. They allegedly helped themselves to 'souvenirs'. 'Among the various stories is one to the effect that Lady Burrows, emerging from the bathroom found three unwashed Indians peacefully reposing in her bed'.[100] Here was one example of what Jim Masselos calls the 'breaking down [of] the boundaries that had marked the separate space and distinct territories of the rulers, the distances that had been established over the past to keep them apart' (Masselos 1988: 44). Such scenes conveyed the message that 'there was no space, no territory, that was not owned by or accessible to the people of a Free India, and the Government and its territory were now the people's'.[101] The departing Governor, his wife and ADCs had to be 'smuggled out' from the rear entrance, thus marking a curious 'finale' to the passing of British rule in Bengal and signifying an 'incident-free' coming of independence to the city.

## FROM EUPHORIA TO APORIA

As the celebrations drew to a close it was ironical that 'national leaders' in their speeches during the official ceremonies were indulging in hollow sentimentalism about the 'minorities' which had been left across the border. For instance, Nehru declared with some emotion in his Independence Day message:

> We think also of our brothers and sisters who have been cut off from us by physical boundaries and who unhappily cannot share at present

> in the freedom that has come. They are of us and will remain of us whatever may happen, and we shall be sharers in their good and ill fortune alike.[102]

Jinnah expressed similar emotions in Karachi for the millions of Muslims who were to find themselves in Indian territories once the Boundary Commission award became known. To them he offered these words of solace:

> Those of our brethren who are minorities in Hindustan may rest assured that we shall never neglect or forget them. . . . I recognise that it is the Muslim minority provinces in this sub-continent who were the pioneers and carried the banner aloft for the achievement of our cherished goal of Pakistan. (Ali 1967: 239)

He advised them to 'adjust themselves to new and difficult circumstances' particularly because 'they might face resentment from the majority community for having supported the demand for Pakistan'. He counselled them to 'give unflinching loyalty to the state in which they happened to be' (ibid.).

Other leaders carried such tokenism even further. Vallabhbhai Patel, India's newly-appointed deputy prime minister, in his independence day broadcast said: 'Our hearts go out to those who were with us so long but who are now to be separated . . . Few can realise the bitterness and sorrow which partition has brought to those who cherished unity but lived to fashion its details'. He avowed:

> Let our brethren across the border not feel that they are neglected or forgotten. Their welfare will claim our vigilance and we shall follow with abiding interest their future in full hope and confidence that sooner than later we shall again be united in common allegiance to our country.

Likewise, on Independence Day morning, Rajendra Prasad declared in the Indian Constituent Assembly:

> It is undoubtedly a day of rejoicing. But there is only one thought, which mars and detracts from the fullness of this happy event. India,

> which was made by God and Nature to be one, which culture and tradition and history of millenniums have made one, is divided today and many there are on the other side of the boundary who would much rather be on this side. To them we send a word of cheer and assurance and ask them not to give way to panic or despair but to live with faith and courage in peace with their neighbours and fulfil the duties of loyal citizenship and thus win their rightful place. . . . We feel assured that they all will be treated fairly and justly without any distinction or discrimination. Let us hope and pray that the day will come when even those who have insisted upon and brought about this division will realise India's essential oneness and we shall, be united once again. . . . It may appear to be a dream but it is no more fantastic a dream than that of those who wanted a division and may well be, realised even sooner than we dare hope for today. (Constituent Assembly of India 1947, 5: 1–22)

However, the attempt of the new rulers of India and Pakistan to 'baptise' people into lessons of citizenship was a colossal failure as later events showed so dramatically. The political inheritors of the British Raj had been preoccupied with carving out *territory* for their respective nation-states. Their sole concern in the run-up to the events of 14–15 August had been how to maximise their advantage in terms of political boundaries. It was extraordinary that in the protracted negotiations, which took place among the British, the Congress and the Muslim League, there was a conspicuous lack of concern with the fundamental issue of *citizenship*. Questions such as what the creation of the new states would mean for the 'minority' communities, their right of residence, and their status in the new nations were not even considered. Following the outbreak of large-scale disturbances in the Punjab, the violence which erupted there and in other parts of the subcontinent was portrayed as 'religious strife', rather than as an assertion by the people of their right of residence, or an affirmation on their part of their 'natural' citizenship to a land where they had been born or raised. In the event, the outcome was well-known—unprecedented violence and mass displacement. It has been poignantly but aptly summarised by Shorish Kashmiri, a poet, journalist and someone who was displaced as a consequence of partition. He offers the following verdict on the events of 14–15 August 1947:

> Conches were blown in India. Drums were beaten in Pakistan. All India Radio proclaimed Independence by broadcasting *Bande Matram* and Pakistan Radio did so with recitation of the Quran. But as day dawned, both sides began to butcher their minorities in the name of religion. . . . In India it was the Muslims who were butchered: in Pakistan the Sikhs and Hindus. Now the riots ceased to be communal. On the contrary, it was genocide of the minorities by the majorities. (Kashmiri 1995: 155)

In conclusion several useful insights emerge from a reconstruction—however partial and imperfect—of the events of 14–15 August 1947. First, it is striking that responses to the celebrations were not uniform across the subcontinent. There were distinct ways in which different cities and towns responded to the events. Such differentiation had everything to do with the location of the place itself in the larger territorial reconfigurations which were then underway across the subcontinent. Further, the diversity of responses was also due to what Edward Shils (1975) has called 'cultural centers' and 'peripheries'. Thus the ceremonials in Karachi and New Delhi, which embodied self-constituted 'cultural centres' of 'core' national values, played an important part in inviting participation and confirmation on the part of their 'peripheries'.[103] Quite clearly, as the discussion has tried to show, cities like Delhi were at the forefront of the commemorations, while others like Dhaka were 'backwaters' which had to be integrated into the process of national affirmation. At many places participation in the events was thin or sporadic. In the Punjab, all available evidence seems to suggest a complete absence of festivity, with mere ritual observances involving the salutation of flags and oath-taking by leaders. State rituals failed to rally the people into participating in ceremonies which could bring them together into a community—imagined or otherwise—even temporarily.

Further, upon closer scrutiny it is quite clear that the imagery of rapturous popular expressions of joy across India and Pakistan at the coming of freedom seems no more than a larger-than-life, blown-up myth. The events of 14–15 August 1947 failed to create a sense of cohesion or consensus among different groups by bringing them together in a common celebration of the birth of the 'nation'.[104] Rather, the consecration rituals which the two nation-states staged with much fanfare and ceremony conveyed meanings that were different to different groups. As this discussion has attempted to highlight, the rituals of independence—as these were experienced by people at that time—had profound ambiguities. However, these ambiguities have either been effaced due to the passage of time, or new meanings have been invested to the events by state rituals which through annual reiteration commemorate only one aspect of the event—the birth of the nation.[105] As a consequence, the multiple meanings and the range of experiences of what the coming of independence signified to people in India and Pakistan have been lost, if not significantly altered.

It is noteworthy that a few days before independence, Gandhi expressed his sense of foreboding and aporia about the approaching event. He likened it to one of the mythical churning of the ocean from which the universe was created according to Hindu beliefs. The *Harijan* in its 10 August 1947 issue noted:

> In the mythological churning of the ocean were discovered poison and nectar along with other valuable gifts. All the gifts were shared by the *Devas* and the *Asuras*. The Lord Shiva had to swallow the poison to save the world. The mighty struggle for India's independence might well be compared with the churning of the ocean. It has yielded the nectar of independence and the poison of partition. There are many who have had to swallow the poison of partition. Let us hope like the figurative Lord Shiva they will emerge all the stronger for the deadly drink.[106]

Clearly then, the outcomes of the events of 14–15 August 1947 in the Indian subcontinent were complex, long-term, with multiple meanings to different communities and peoples.

## NOTES

1. Ravinder Kumar (1998: 52) regards it as 'a stupendous achievement which opened the possibility of transforming the human condition within the country'.

2. The historian Jim Masselos (1996, 1988) has done interesting work on nationalist and state rituals.

3. For an interesting study of political ritual in another context, see Kong and Yeoh (1997).

4. The literature highlighting this aspect of 1947 has really become salient in the studies of Partition which have emerged in the last 10 years or so; see,

for example, Butalia (2000); Ghosh (2007); Hasan (2001); Khan (2007); Menon and Bhasin (1998); Nair (2011); Pandey (2001); Roy (2012); Tan and Kudaisya (2000); Zamindar (2007).

5. For a run-up to the event, based on newspaper reports, by a BBC radio journalist, see Upadhyay (1997). Also see Bhasin (1988).

6. Viceroy's Personal Report, 18 July 1947, in Mansergh (1983, 12: 230).

7. Cabinet, India and Burma Committee, Paper I. B. (47) 147, Ceremonies in India on 15th August and Flag, Memorandum by Secretary of State for India, 26 July 1947, L/P&J/10/136, in Mansergh (1983, 12: 362–63). The manner in which the flag at the Residency in Lucknow was removed and the precautions which the British took to ensure its safety is recounted in detail in Tuker (1950).

8. Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) to Dominion High Commissioners, 1 August 1947, in Mansergh (1983, 12: 466).

9. Cabinet, India and Burma Committee, Paper I. B. (47) 43rd Meeting, Ceremonies in India on 15th August and Flag, Minutes, 28 July 1947, R/30/1/12, in Mansergh (1983, 12: 381–82).

10. Viceroy's Personal Report, 8 August 1947, in Mansergh (1983, 12: 595).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 594.

13. The Constituent Assembly first met in New Delhi on 9 December 1946 in the Constitution Hall which is now known as the Central Hall of Parliament House. It was boycotted by the Muslim League and its first three sessions of December 1946, and January and April 1947 were held amidst controversy about its representative character.

14. Congress Circular, *Hindustan Times*, 21 July 1947.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. *Dawn*, 3 August 1947.

18. *Dawn*, 28 July 1947.

19. *Dawn*, 6 August 1947.

20. In the words of Christophe Jaffrelot (1993: 26–27), 'the Hindutva of Savarkar was conceived primarily as an ethnic community possessing a territory and sharing the same racial and cultural characteristics, three attributes which stemmed from the mythical reconstruction of the Vedic Golden Age'.

21. Jaffrelot (ibid.: 27) writes that 'for Savarkar the territory of India cannot be dissociated from Hindu culture and the Hindu people'. 'In his eyes, Hindus are pre-eminently the descendents of the "intrepid Aryans [who] made it [the subcontinent] their home and lighted their first fire on the banks of the [. . .] Indus", a river which he considers to be the western border of the Hindu nation' (ibid.).

22. For details of their relative strength and position within the Congress, see Graham (1990: 4).

23. This is shown with ample evidence by Chatterji (1994).

24. In late 1947, RSS cadres of *swayamsevaks* stood at 600,000. The largest concentrations were in UP (200,000), Greater Punjab (including Delhi and Himachal) (125,000), Bombay (60,000), Bihar (50,000) and Punjab, where it had risen from 46,000 in January 1947 to 59,200 by June 1947 (Jaffrelot 1993: 26–27).

25. *Dawn*, 11 August 1947.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Author's interview with Begum Aizaz Rasul, Lucknow, 1989. Also see her statement in *Star of India*, 12 August 1947.

29. *Star of India*, 24 July 1947.

30. *The Times of India*, 12 August 1947.

31. On this controversy, see *Hindustan Times*, 8–12 August 1947.

32. *Dawn*, 3 August 1947.

33. *Dawn*, 30 July 1947.

34. *Dawn*, 26 July 1947.

35. *Dawn*, 30 July 1947.

36. *Dawn*, 8 August 1947

37. *Dawn*, 30 July 1947

38. *Dawn*, 5 August 1947.

39. *The Statesman*, 9 August 1947.

40. *Dawn*, 8 August 1947.

41. *Dawn*, 11 August 1947.

42. Ibid.

43. Wilfred Russell was an important British businessman who joined Killick Nixon & Company in Bombay in 1935 and was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1937. See Russell (1951: 123–30).

44. As a prominent Congressmen and personal friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, his memories of Karachi came from earlier associations such as the historic Congress session of 1931 when he was the General Secretary.

45. Ahmed (1997: 176) observes: 'Although a great king, he was far from a ideal Muslim ruler. His harem had 1000 wives, he drank, introduced *din-e-ilahi* a hotchpotch of some of the established religions, with himself as a focal point, which made the *ulema* unhappy'.

46. *Dawn*, 29 July 1947.

47. *Dawn*, 1 August 1947. Bawa Bachittar Singh, a prominent Sikh member, suggested that the Corporation should organise a procession. Mrs Ansari called upon Hindu and Muslim residents of the city to 'meet each other with the same feelings of brotherly love as one Muslims shows towards another

on the day of Id'. Dr Yudhvir Singh, junior vice president of the Municipal Committee, said that on that solemn day they shall have to remember the great responsibility that devolved on a free people as Indians 'have attained their freedom after undergoing the baptism of fire, blood and tears'. Singh claimed that '60 lakhs of people had suffered imprisonment for one to 20 years in His Majesty's prisons in the struggle for freedom. Thousands had sacrifices their lives in the cause. Many of them were hanged by the Government of the day. Others had suffered penal servitude and died in prison'.

48. *Dawn*, 3 August 1947.

49. For instance, see the appeal of Begum Noor-us-Sabah, Secretary, Women's Muslim League, Delhi, in *Dawn*, 5 August 1947.

50. *Dawn*, 5 August 1947.

51. *Dawn*, 29 July 1947.

52. On preparations for these ceremonies, see *Hindustan Times*, 13 August 1947; also *Statesman*, 15 August 1947.

53. Shorish Kashmiri (1914–75), a prominent Muslim journalist and editor of the journal *Chattan*, recalls the occasion in the following words:

'Abul Kalam Azad—which means literally master of oratory—was not himself. He had become someone else. His heart was pounding. In his subconscious, his eloquence had conceded defeat. All his joys seemed fictitious. His cheerful countenance was struck with sorrow. He was overcome by depression. . . . Abul Kalam Azad wept in solitude. Lakhs of Hindus in the country were rejoicing. With them a throng of Nationalist Muslims, indulging in hollow laughter. But the hearts of crores of Muslims were seized with fear at the approaching morrow about to dawn, with daggers drawn and knives aimed at them' (Kashmiri 1995: 155).

54. For a valuable textual analysis of the anthem and its symbolism, see Sarkar (1996).

55. Nawab Ismail Khan (1884–1958) (son of Nawab Ishaq Khan, a prominent landlord and one of the leading lights of the Aligarh University) was a lawyer and politician, a member of the Legislative Council in the 1920s, and a prominent leader of the Muslim League in UP.

56. Letter to the Editor, *Dawn*, 12 August 1947.

57. Editorial, *Dawn*, 15 August 1947.

58. Jaluan Fire Works Co., Yahiaganj, Lucknow, to Acharya Kriplani, President, All India Congress Committee (AICC), 26 August 1947, AICC Papers, G-19, 1947–48.

59. For a discussion of the context of violence in the Princely States of Alwar and Bharatpur during 1947, see Copland (1998: 203–39).

60. *Hindustan Times*, 13 August 1947.

61. *Hindustan Standard*, 24 July 1947.

62. *Hindustan Standard*, 23 July 1947.

63. *Hindustan Standard*, 2 August 1947.

64. *Hindustan Standard*, 4 August 1947.

65. *Star of India*, 6 August 1947.

66. *Star of India*, 9 August 1947.

67. *Hindustan Standard*, 6 August 1947.

68. *Hindustan Standard*, 7 August 1947.

69. *Hindustan Standard*, 11 August 1947.

70. *Hindustan Standard*, 17 August 1947.

71. Ibid.

72. *Hindustan Standard*, 18 August 1947.

73. *Star of India*, 20 August 1947.

74. Chatterji (2007) provides an excellent account of the border controversies.

75. *Dawn*, 6 August 1947.

76. Ibid.

77. *Dawn*, 9 August 1947.

78. *Star of India*, 10 August 1947.

79. *Star of India*, 13 August 1947.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. *Harijan*, 9 August 1947, p. 293. Also see Payne (1971: 533).

85. *Harijan*, 10 August 1947, pp. 293–94.

86. Talk of Manu Gandhi, 1 June 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 52).

87. Ibid.

88. See for example speeches at prayer meetings, 16 June and 24 June 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 164, 204).

89. Letter to Munnalal G. Shah, 11 June 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 130).

90. Letter to Munnalal G. Shah, 11 June 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 341).

91. Speech at prayer meeting, 10 June 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 125).

92. Interview with Arthur Moore, a former editor of the *Statesman*, 10 July 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 311).

93. Charles O. Thomson, American Consul to Secretary of State, US State Department (Confidential) Papers on South Asia, 27 August 1947.

94. Speech at prayer meeting, 20 July 1947, in Gandhi (1983, 88: 380).

95. *Harijan*, 10 August 1947.

96. *Harijan*, 18 August 1947.

97. Charles O. Thomson, American Consul to Secretary of State, US State Department (Confidential) Papers on South Asia, 27 August 1947.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid.

102. Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The Appointed Day', A Message to the Press from New Delhi, 15 August 1947, in Nehru (1949b: 5).

103. For a useful discussion of how these centre–periphery ties have played an important role in two other contexts of national commemorations, see Spillman (1997).

103. For an interesting discussion of what such rituals of commemoration try to achieve, see Bennett (1992).

105. For a discussion of some of these issues, see Gillis (1997).

106. *Harijan*, 10 August 1947. *Devas* and *Asuras* are Hindi terms for gods and demons, and Shiva is the principal Hindu deity associated with the creation of the universe.

CHAPTER 2

# Partition and Independence in Delhi

## 1947–48

Gyanendra Pandey

*This is a Partition-Independence that we have not always faced up to in our history-writing and our public presentations of that moment of 'liberation'.*

*A focus on the Muslims of a disturbed and high-profile place such as Delhi in 1947–48 allows us to recover something of the suppressed memories of Partition and Independence, at the same time as we ask something about the way in which the history of these events has been written up.*

The story of the marking of nations and their histories can be told in many ways; for there are obviously differing, and changing, points of view both within and outside the nation, and differing degrees of access to the rights of citizenship (and of history). It is one way of telling this story of Partition and Independence in the subcontinent and the displacement that came with it that I seek to examine in this paper. In the context of 1947, a moment of quite incredible uprooting and violence, displacement in its physical sense refers generally to evacuation and migration. There is, however, another rather unusual aspect to this history of displacement: one that has not been widely discussed. This is the displacement of people who found nowhere to go even after they had been pushed around from place to place—the making of people into refugees in their own homes.

By focusing on the condition of Muslim refugees in Delhi in 1947, I have tried to say something about the trauma of moving with nowhere to move, and something too perhaps about the construction of memory as a means of dealing with where one has arrived. To the extent that these are fairly general phenomena—and, in my view, they are—attention to detail of the kind presented here becomes all the more necessary. For memories, it hardly needs to be said now, are no simple reflection of 'experience', and experience is not available (even to those who 'experience') in some pure and unmediated form (Scott 1991). Given that experience and memory are both made in complex ways, and that they are dependent upon cultural heritage and received modes of understanding, recording, telling, upon repetition and accumulation (individual and collective), occasion and audience, upon 'distance' too and the extent of the break from the past that is involved in the condition of memory, the experience of Delhi in 1947, and the memories of some of its older citizens, may tell us more than a little about how the national experience and the national memory has been constructed in India—about what has been included and what left out.[1]

## I

I have hyphenated 'Partition' and 'Independence', as it were. What was the relationship between the two, in Delhi or elsewhere?

'Independence is . . . an abstract thing', declares one senior intellectual whose family migrated to Delhi from Lahore in 1947, 'it didn't give you anything tangible'. On the other hand, partition was 'in a negative sense a very tangible reality . . . Whenever we met, as a family—for us, it was Partition, not Independence [that counted].' 'Partition changed the course of many lives which would otherwise have run in their familiar channels', another middle-class migrant from west Punjab asserts.[2]

One suggestion that is implied here is worth emphasising. It is often only when violence and terror touch one's immediate surroundings that one recognises the 'reality' of certain events—much as India's middle classes awoke anew to the horror of 'communal' riots when these threatened to invade their own homes and localities in 1984 and 1992–93. The point was illustrated very well indeed in 1947 by the reactions of no less well-informed a person than the last viceroy of colonial India and the first governor-general of an independent one, Louis Mountbatten, who seems to have recognised the true enormity of Partition only when it came to affect his own staff. His account of that realisation is worth summarising.

An ADC of the governor-general, Flight Lieutenant W. Beaumont, who had taken the night train from Simla to Delhi the previous night, rang Mountbatten on 1 September to say that the train had been stopped by an armed mob and every Muslim on it butchered, except for his own bearer whom he managed somehow to conceal under his seat. That same day, having just learnt of the murder of their son in Delhi, Khan Sahib Ghulam Nabi, a treasurer on Mountbatten's staff, and his wife took the night train to Delhi. This train was attacked as well and every Muslim on it killed, including the treasurer and his wife, in spite of the fact that they were locked up inside a first-class compartment and the armed guard on the train had been asked to keep a special eye on their safety.

Writing to the prime minister and the defence minister, Mountbatten noted that Ghulam Nabi had put in 30 years in government service and was 'of course' a native of the Dominion of India. Mountbatten was now exercised over the problem of getting the rest of his staff out of Simla, about a third of them UP Muslims who had opted to stay on in India; and he wrote:

> I must admit that I am more shaken by the events which have touched my own staff than by the events one reads about in the newspapers . . . I feel that a situation which allows the night train from Kalka to Delhi to be stopped on two successive nights and all the Muslim passengers to be butchered in front of the guards is so serious . . . that the defence minister really must act strongly.[3]

'Partition' and 'Independence' are both abstractions: but one is seen as being different from the other because of its immediacy. A distinction is also drawn between them because, for most Indian national observers and analysts, Partition diverted Indian politics and society from 'the normal course of history'. Independence changed lives as well, but only by carrying them forward in their 'familiar channels', and only gradually—over time. Partition cut those channels, as one stroke. In that sense, it was more tangible—at least for some families and communities.

The relationship between Partition and Independence is of course a great deal more complex than that. In Pakistan, one may not need even to differentiate between the two: Partition was Independence. But in India too, as this will already have indicated, it depends very much on the class and community to which one belongs, and where one happened to live in 1947. The statements cited in the preceding paragraphs come from well-to-do middle-class Hindus whose families migrated from Lahore to Delhi and Bombay. Less-privileged groups, from the Muslim community for instance, besieged in Old or New Delhi in 1947, articulate the relation differently.

'Mere hisse mein azadi aai hi kahan? (When did I ever receive any share of Independence)' asks Muhammad Khalid, a bookseller from the Jama Masjid area of Old Delhi. 'Here, there is only Partition and the pain of Partition . . . Virtually all my relatives are in Pakistan'. 'It was only after the riots started that people began to recognise that Independence had come, Partition had occurred, India and Pakistan had been established', said Rashiduddin Khan, a Muslim whose family had owned a shop in the plush market of Connaught Place in 1947. 'To tell you the truth, it was only in the bloodshed of partition that ordinary people saw the shape of independence'.[4]

The two faces of the Partition and Independence of India in 1947 are not in fact, I want to suggest, two separate faces at all—for the two condition each other, constitute each other, at every step. If there are two faces in evidence in northern India at this time, they are the faces of different classes—which I shall call, loosely, a 'ruling (privileged) class' celebrating Independence, and a 'refugee class' unable to do so. And while the separate existence of these classes is most evident in the areas directly affected by Partition, the rest of the subcontinent scarcely remains unmarked by it—for it must be borne in mind that entire communities in India and Pakistan ('Muslims' in some regions, 'Hindus' and 'Sikhs' in others) became part of a subordinated, persecuted, hunted class of refugees, at least for some length of time.

The two faces that I have referred to are represented in Delhi by two very different answers to the question, 'What were you doing on 15 August 1947?' One response is symbolised by Nehru's well-known, and moving, Independence speech: 'At the stroke of the midnight hour while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom . . .' Another is captured in the angry rejoinder of a Sikh shopkeeper now living in Bhogal, a small 'mohalla' sandwiched between the refugee colonies of Jangpura and Lajpat Nagar in New Delhi.

This Sikh shopkeeper arrived here as a child with his family, when large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs had fled from their homes in Rawalpindi and Multan districts in March 1947, and moved from place to place in search of safety and sustenance. Those who arrived in Bhogal, still a village in 1947, drove out the local Muslims in the process of attrition that ensued. 'What were you doing on 15 August 1947?' I asked. 'What do you think we were doing?' was the shopkeeper's enraged response. 'Wondering where we'd be from one day to the next—whether we'd be able to stay on, finally, even in this place . . . That's what we were doing . . .'[5]

Interestingly, these two faces of Partition/Independence are to be found sometimes within a single celebratory narrative. Such is the case, for example, with the distinguished Hindi writer, Krishna Sobhti's account of her experiences in 1947. A college student in Lahore at the time, Sobhti had come to Delhi to celebrate her birthday in early 1947. She planned to stay for two days, as she recalls, but in the event never went back. In the months that followed many more people arrived from what would become West Pakistan, and some Muslim neighbours and friends moved away. By August there were 40 to 50 refugees in her father's bungalow, many of considerable status and privilege. 'It was a strange feeling'. One person arrived with nothing but a bag on his shoulder: 'for two days he didn't say a word'. Women and children came, looking blank, lost.

On the night of 14 August, Krishna Sobhti and her younger brother put up an exhibition in the veranda of their house, with photographs of Gandhi, Nehru and others, and extracts from their speeches. 'We were asserting our rights as Delhi-ites and as citizens, so to speak'. At midnight, when the national song was sung over the radio and Nehru made his 'stroke of midnight' speech, the regular inhabitants of the household were in tears. The newcomers, however, still stared vacantly. A servant then brought out a tray laden with sweets, made especially for the occasion in the three colours of the national flag. Sobhti says that she can never forget how, as the servant took the tray around, 'everyone who had come from outside, these 40 or 50 men and women . . . who were guests in our house, got up one by one and left the verandah . . .'[6]

The memories of G. D. Khosla, a judge of the Punjab High Court, who moved from Lahore to Mussoorie for the summer vacation of 1947 (once again, never to return), provide another striking example of the divided soul of Delhi. Khosla and his wife went down to the capital specifically to witness the 'transfer of power' ceremony on 14–15

August 1947. 'Never have I been so moved and for so long as on that unforgettable occasion', he recalls in his autobiography.

> There was an atmosphere of quiet, purposeful expectation [inside Parliament House]. No one spoke loudly, as if the reverence due to the invisible presiding deity had hushed everyone . . . Total strangers greeted me with quiet, benign smiles, and though I was wearing clothes of western style, I felt myself a portion of the khadi clad assembly. In a few moments, I would be a free citizen of India . . . I kept saying to myself that we were free, free, free. (Khosla 1985: 160)

Khosla goes onto describing the government of India's official flag-hoisting function at India Gate the next morning as:

> a happy, uninhibited exhibition of fun. There was no question of a quiet, orderly, dignified flag-hoisting . . . The huge crowd that had come to witness the ceremony just could not contain their euphoria. The people surrounded the stage-carriage in which the Mountbattens drove up, and shouted, giving expression to their joy . . . The memory of the natural and spontaneous jubilation manifested by the crowd around me on that memorable day gives me a warm, delicious glow of joy and of pride. (Khosla 1985: 160–61)

Four months later, the author was appointed to undertake an enquiry into the workings of the Custodian of Evacuee Property in Delhi, and to settle if possible the opposing claims of Delhi's Muslims (large numbers of whom were in refugee camps at the Old Fort and in Humayun's Tomb by this time) on the one hand, and Hindu and Sikh refugees who had migrated from West Pakistan on the other. Overcome by the immensity of his task, Khosla went to see Gandhi late in January 1948, a few days before Gandhi was assassinated, and began to tell him of his difficulties. This is how he reports the conversation:

> Khosla: "The Muslims in the Old Fort camp have no wish to stay in this country. They told me, when I visited them, that they would like to go to Pakistan as soon as possible. Our own people are without houses or shelter. It breaks my heart to see them suffering like this, exposed to the elements. Tell me, Bapuji, what should I do?"

> Gandhi: "When I go there, they do not say they want to go to Pakistan . . . They are also our people. You should bring them back and protect them." (Ibid.: 175–76)

'I mentioned other facts, other difficulties', says Khosla. 'He pointed out the flaws in my argument . . . When I left him after having spent thirty minutes in his company, I knew what I had to do' (ibid.).

Delhi does not represent all of India. However, I speak of Delhi alone here, because it makes no sense to try and speak of India as a whole in any summary way, because the focus on one locale will allow me to speak in relatively concrete terms, and because—for a variety of reasons—Delhi reflected in concentrated form several tendencies that were at work in other parts of the subcontinent too in 1947.

## II

It needs to be reiterated that the response of the Sikh shopkeeper from Bhogal—'wondering where we'd be from one day to the next, that's what we were doing'—speaks not only of the condition of Sikh (or Hindu) refugees in Delhi in 1947. It speaks of the condition of all of those who lived outside the circle of 'ruling class' Delhi, in what we might call 'refugee' Delhi. It speaks of the condition of Muslim refugees all over northern India (and in some parts of southern India too), and in some sense of the situation of the majority of the population of Delhi who did not know for several months in 1947–48 what the immediate future would bring and where they would find themselves in that future.

Delhi was a city of perhaps 9.5 lakh people in 1947 (9.18 lakhs at the census of 1941). Of these, 3.3 lakh Muslims left the city at Partition, leaving about 6 lakh people (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and others) behind. Nearly 5 lakh non-Muslim refugees arrived in the city at the same time, making the balance of the new (refugee) inhabitants and the older inhabitants of the city pretty much on par. Even in 1951, by which time the city had expanded considerably (the population of 17.44 lakh marking a 90 per cent increase on the 1941 figure), Partition refugees (not including the local Muslims) still accounted for 28.4 per cent of the total population of the city (see Datta 1993: 287–96).[7] In more ways than we have been willing to acknowledge—politically, culturally and even demographically—the Delhi of the 1950s to the 1980s was a 'Partition' city.[8]

A week after formal Partition and Independence it was estimated that 130,000 refugees had arrived in Delhi from outside. A report in October still put the figure of outside refugees at 150,000. By January 1948, according to another report, there were 400,000 refugees here from Punjab alone.[9]

It is not always clear who is, and who is not, classed as a refugee in these reports, nor what are considered to be the boundaries of Delhi for purposes of enumeration. Figures for the period are notoriously unreliable—either because they apply some rather narrow standard, such as that of people registered at centralised offices and refugee camps, or because they reproduce rumours or exaggerate for effect in press or private reports. Taken together, however, contemporary and later accounts give us more than a passing indication of the literal transformation of Delhi into a 'refugee-istan', with a staggering number of people seeking to find new homes or a safe haven in the city, and an equally staggering number of other refugees imprisoned in their own homes or in refugee camps nearby.

By the end of the third week of August, as already noted, rationing authorities estimated that some 130,000 refugees had arrived in Delhi from outside—30,000 of them during the previous fortnight. There were reported to be 12,000 Alwar State refugees (presumably, mostly Meo peasants) in 16 different relief camps in the city: the biggest of these camps was on the maidan in front of the Jama Masjid (the great mosque of Shah Jahan's Delhi), where some 5,000 of them were crowded. Other Muslims, from within Delhi and the regions round about, were to join these growing numbers in the following days—as every place that offered any suggestion of security was turned into a refugee camp. A few examples will serve to illustrate the condition of the city at this time.

On 3 September violence broke out in some villages neighbouring Delhi on the south-west. From Palam airport, three or four miles away, military officers saw smoke rising from these habitations. As Muslim residents were looted, killed and driven away, 300 of them sought refuge in the airport precincts where a number of troops (including some Muslims) were stationed.[10]

By 7 September, the 'Pakistan Transfer Office' at 'L' Block in Connaught Place (which was responsible for organising the transport of Pakistan government officials and property to Pakistan) had 'taken the shape of a refugee camp', as a Muslim officer stationed there put it.

By that evening there were about 6,000 Muslims assembled at the site, a majority of them from the privileged Lodi Colony area. By the evening of the 8th, the number of refugees in the 'L' Block 'camp' had increased to 12,000. 'Our own flat had become a small refugee camp', the officer noted, 'as all the women and children of the surrounding flats had come there'.[11]

Around the same time, tens of thousands of other Muslims of Delhi were driven out of their homes to places that provided at least the idea of strength in numbers and a modicum of security—the Jama Masjid area itself, Nizamuddin and Okhla, other graveyards and abandoned Muslim monuments, the houses of cabinet ministers Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmed Qidwai and any other Muslim notable whose dwelling appeared comparatively secure, the Pakistani High Commission, and when these overflowed or (as in the case of the Jama Masjid locality) themselves became insecure, the huge refugee camps that were set up in the Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb.

By mid-September, we are told, there were as many as 121,000 Muslim refugees; and their number was to grow to 164,000 within a short while. In early October, figures of 62,000 and 63,000 Muslim refugees were quoted for the Purana Qila (Old Fort) and Humayun's Tomb refugee camps respectively, though some put the figure in the Old Fort at 80,000 or even higher.[12] Already, by mid-September, perhaps 60 per cent of the Muslims of Old Delhi and 90 per cent of those in New Delhi had fled, seeking refugee. Between 20,000 and 25,000 were said to have been killed. Towards the end of October, about 1.5 lakh of Delhi's 5 lakh Muslims remained.[13]

Anees Qidwai put the number of people in the Purana Qila in the month of September at 80,000 to 100,000. Even when she got there in October, when the numbers had declined to 60,000 or so, there was 'as far as the eye could see' nothing but 'disorganised tents and heaps of tin roofs' amidst which 'naked children, unkempt women, girls without their heads covered and men overcome with anger wandered up and down endlessly' (Qidwai 1990: 38–39, 56.). There was difficulty in obtaining water, with only one tap outside the Qila in September, and initially no elaborate organisation for the provision of food either.

The conditions in the Purana Qila 'defied description', wrote one senior British official: 'no food, no water, no sanitary arrangements, not even assured security'.[14] Zakir Husain put it more searingly in his evidence before the Delhi government's 'Emergency' Committee: those who had made it to the camp had escaped from 'sudden death', he said, to be 'buried in a living grave' (Azad 1988 [1959]: 233).

Abul Kalam Azad, Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi, Ebadat Barelvi, Anees Qidwai and Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi are only some of those who have written about those tortured days when 'murder stalked the town' and Muslims found it hard to move out of their homes (and then, at some point, to remain in their homes too), when 'men and women of all kinds and condition—rich and poor, young and old—huddled together in sheer fear of life' and 'no Muslim householder could go to sleep at night with the confidence that he [*sic*] would wake up alive the next morning' (ibid.: 228–30).

'September, 1947 will be remembered by Delhi residents as a period of horror', wrote a British resident at the beginning of October.[15] 'Moslems were being systematically hunted down and hutchered', wrote another.

> Thousands of them were herded into camps . . . The dead lay rotting in the streets, because there was no one to collect and bury them. The hospitals were choked with dying and wounded, and in imminent danger of attack because of the presence of Moslem staff and Moslem patients . . . Appeals for protection poured in from every side. . .[16]

On 4 September, reports a Muslim military officer who was attached to the Quarter Master General's Branch at army headquarters in connection with the movement of Pakistan government officials and materials to Karachi, Delhi had been under an 88-hour curfew. Nevertheless, 'Sikhs could be seen moving about in jeeps, armed with swords and possibly other weapons'; and there was a widespread rumour that violence would occur on a large scale on or about 5 September.[17]

The context of this rumours is provided perhaps by the planned evacuation of Pakistan government personnel who were stranded in Delhi. While some 8,000 officials who had opted for Pakistan had already left for Karachi by special trains, another 6,000 or so still waited in Delhi owing to the suddenly much increased insecurity of rail travel.[18] 'Operation Pakistan', which aimed to take these officials out by air, was scheduled to be launched at Palam airport on 4 September.

But a directive is alleged to have gone out in the meantime from underground anti-Pakistani quarters that Pakistan personnel and property were not to be allowed to escape.[19]

Even the barest outline of some of the incidents of violence that occurred in Delhi in September conveys something of the terror that Muslims had to live through. On 5 September, when widespread and concerted attacks upon Muslims occurred in several areas, the attacks in Qarol Bagh included one upon a high school where students were sitting for their matriculation examination. 'The mob called on the boys of one community to stand and they were butchered [outside the examination hall]', the *New Chronicle* reported.[20] Other reports suggested that the Muslim examinees were separated from the start, and asked by the invigilators to write the examination in another room—where they were later massacred (Dehlavi 1948: 152).

On 7 and 8 September, the attacks spread to some of the best guarded areas of New Delhi and, to quote a Muslim military officer's 'Statement on [the] Disturbances' once again, 'the Muslims of Delhi lost their morale, and the will to resist, because they had not only to resist the well-armed Sikhs but also found the police and military against them'.[21] An European eyewitness reported seeing 'car loads and lorry loads of armed Sikhs freely going around'; and the *Daily Mail* of 9 September carried a report headed 'Police look on as Delhi mobs slay', referring to the slaughter of 50 or more Muslims as they waited at Old Delhi railway station (cited in Malik 1948: 5, 7).

A few incidents reported from New Delhi on 7 September help to drive the point home. In the posh shopping centre of Connaught Place, an enraged Prime Minister Nehru stopped his passing car, grabbed a baton from police personnel who were standing by idly, and personally dispersed some looters near the Odeon cinema.[22] Outside the Regal cinema, 500 yards away, two Muslim servants were struck down with a sword. Five people were killed outside the Roman Catholic Cathedral while the morning service was in progress. At the same time a crowd coming from the Lodi Road area stopped cars that were passing in the vicinity of Willingdon Airport, and dragged out and killed a number of Muslims travelling in them.[23]

At the end of the month, some 200 raiders from nearby villages attacked the Refugee Hospital at Safdarjang in south Delhi. They appear to have scaled the wall together at a pre-arranged signal, and though 10 rounds were fired by the police guard stationed there, three Muslim patients were done to death and several injured in an attack that lasted perhaps five minutes. On the same day, a man was stoned to death in front of a travellers' *sarai* (or inn) at the New Delhi railway station. An eyewitness reported that 'the victim was held down by two men while another hit him on the head with a big stone'.[24]

Towards the end of September when, in spite of the horror of the kinds of incidents mentioned in the previous paragraph, the mayhem and level of general violence had been brought under some control, there were rumours again of a likely recrudescence of killing in early October. Hindu residents of mohalla Jatan, Pahari Dhiraj, Sadar Bazar, were threatened with grave consequences by organised Hindu militants if they continued to provide protection to scavengers and other low-caste Muslims who lived in their streets. About the same time, Indian and European volunteers working in Muslim refugee camps also received similar threats from small groups of Sikhs.[25]

Incidents of stabbing and looting, and clashes between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had of course been in evidence in Delhi for quite a long time before September. This was provoked not only by the extremist propaganda and activities of different parties in the months leading up to August. It was fuelled by uncertainty and calculations about the future, not least among government employees—high and low—of whom there were large numbers in Delhi;[26] by news of riots and killings elsewhere (Calcutta [now Kolkata], Noakhali, Bihar, and then on the very door-step of Delhi, in Garhmukteshwar and Gurgaon); and by the arrival of bodies of Hindu and Sikh refugees from west Punjab, the NWFP and Sindh in the months after March—a stream that became a veritable flood in late August.

Contemporary records as well as later recollections give us a picture of how—as protective gates went up at the boundaries of the mohallas, and preparations for 'defence' were made all around, among Hindus and Sikhs as well as Muslims, and as the police and the army came to stand guard at the mohalla gates, on rooftops and at mosques, targeting mainly the Muslims—a whole community came to feel defenceless, isolated and increasingly suffocated.[27] An escape to Pakistan, or temporarily to the large refugee camps that now sprang up, often became the only options available to the Muslims.

## III

It is perhaps necessary to state that much the same condition obtained over large tracts of territory on the other side of the international border. In large parts of the new domains of India and Pakistan, being a Sikh or a Hindu (on the one side) or a Muslim (on the other) had become virtually synonymous with being a refugee and a foreign national. Local designations, discrimination between different sections of the different religious communities, was at a discount; and whole religious communities came to be 'suspect'. To be a Muslim Meo at this juncture in Bharatpur, Alwar, Gurgaon (or Delhi) was to be a Muslim, plain and simple; and to be a Muslim was to be a 'refugee', and probably a 'Pakistani'. It did not count any longer that this Mewati peasant community, which was converted to Islam some centuries earlier, had always worn its Islam lightly (as other peasant communities wore their Sikhism or their Hinduism lightly), sharing religious festivals and a great deal more with their Hindu kinsfolk and neighbours (as rajput, gujjar and jat Hindu and Sikh kinsmen and women). Indeed the terms 'Muslims' and 'refugees'—or 'Hindu/Sikhs' and 'refugees'—are used more or less interchangeably at many places in the records of the period.

Individual observations and memoirs are replete with examples of the disbelief experienced by one person after another at discovering their own acquaintances and peers, privileged, protected people too, among the hunted refugees. Krishna Sobhti recalls the tears of humiliation in the eyes of a middle-class Muslim neighbour when people from her home went to see him in the Purana Qila camp, and speaks of the touchiness of the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Punjab in her father's bungalow, for the change from privileged and proud—even haughty—backgrounds to the wretched status of 'refugees' was not easy to accept.[28] Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi writes of his and his family's great surprise, and tears, when, on the evening of their arrival in the Purana Qila refugee camp, they found the families of both his elder brother and a younger brother occupying equally cramped and rain-sodden spots but 50 yards away. The two brothers shared a large bungalow in the well-protected, and predominantly official, Civil Lines area of Delhi, and the outcry was natural: 'But I thought your locality was safe?' (Dehlavi 1948: 166). Consider too Nehru's shock, when he visited Sheikhpura on 31 August, at finding 'old colleagues . . . [now] bereft of everything . . . trudging along with the rest of the caravan [of destitute wanderers]'.[29]

The business of reducing everything to 'Hindu' (or 'Hindu/Sikh') and 'Muslim', and hence unwanted, went even further than that. It was not people alone but the very clothes they wore that were now pronounced as being 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. As Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, a professor of History in the University of Delhi, was to put it in his account of his and his family's escape from the University campus in September 1947, the women 'put on Hindu caste marks on their foreheads and put on Hindu clothes' (1970: 368). Not 'Punjabi' or 'Bengali', even though that too could be misleading, or 'middle class', or any such classification, but 'Hindu'. The caste marks and the clothes referred to are, presumably, the 'bindi' and the 'saree', neither an exclusively Hindu attribute then or now: indeed women prime ministers of both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have continued to wear the saree as their national dress to this day.

In the difficult circumstances of Partition, however, even demeanour seems to have become 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. How else can we understand the actions of certain officials and workers who rounded up numerous Hindu women in the course of operations to recover abducted Muslim women for repatriation to Pakistan in the years 1947–49? 'Because of the hasty zeal of the workers', a leading woman social worker observed. 'Hindu women are sometimes arrested [*sic*] and taken to the camp for Muslim recovered women'. Sardarni Santokh Singh, the Delhi provincial organiser of these 'recovery' operations had reported six such wrongful 'arrests' within a two-month period in the Delhi region alone. Premvati Thapar and other workers had also noticed several examples of such 'mistakes'.[30] It is the demeanour of the 'Hindu' or 'Muslim', again, that would account for Sa'adat Hasan Manto's searing vignette 'mishtake', in which some people kill an 'enemy' only to discover on cutting his trouser-strings that they have made a 'mishtake' (Manto 1991). The frantic effort to divide up everything possible into 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', 'Indian' and 'Pakistani', also provides the context for the troubled statement of Josh Malihabadi and other Urdu writers belonging to the Progressive Writers' Movement that Urdu (the common heritage of urbanised Hindus and Muslims at least in the Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Lucknow, Hyderabad regions) could not be partitioned:[31] a prediction that seems to have been belied by the paths charted out by official policies in both India and Pakistan.[32]

With the disastrous equations that were being made between Urdu and Muslim, Hindu and Indian, and so on, it seemed at one point in 1947 that the Delhi administration, if not the government of India as a whole, had given up responsibility for the Muslims of the Delhi region. It was claimed by several ministers in the Emergency Committee meetings of the Indian cabinet in September that virtually all Muslims who were in the Muslim refugee camps of Delhi wanted to go to Pakistan. And, while this view was challenged by other members of the same cabinet, and by Gandhi, there is evidence to suggest that the giant refugee camps at Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb were, for some significant length of time, treated by officials of the Indian government as being the responsibility of the Pakistan government.

Several reports indicate a certain imbalance in the conditions in Hindu/Sikh camps on the one hand and Muslim camps on the other, and in the treatment meted out to refugees in the two. This is not to say that conditions in the former were very satisfactory: far from it. However, in the winter of 1947–48, Anees Qidwai was forced to complain to Gandhi that while the government was distributing thousands of blankets and quilts in other refugee camps, those housing Muslim refugees had received no official aid. Many months later, in September 1948, when Gandhi was no longer alive, Qidwai visited the large Hindu/Sikh refugee camp in the old Kingsway (now a locality officially called 'Kingsway Camp') and was again struck by the difference that marked Hindu/Sikh and Muslim refugee conditions. Seeing the considerable quantity of cloth that was available for distribution at Kingsway Camp, she noted in her diary that even a whole year's effort had not enabled her to obtain from the government one set of clothes for distribution to a single one of those Muslim refugees who lay around, in tattered clothes and in fear, in their own refugee camps (Qidwai 1990: 64, 282).[33]

The official Relief Committee in Delhi had apparently been instructed that its task was to look after Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan. Hence Qidwai's observation that unofficial Peace Committees were taking care of Muslim refugees in August–September 1948, and an official department was responsible for the relief and rehabilitation of Hindus and Sikhs from outside: but there was no one to look after the local Hindus, mostly dalits (or harijans), who had been displaced from their lands and homes in the villages—'No department had been opened for them' (ibid.: 275).

It is worth noting too that it was some time after the emergence of a serious problem in regard to the maintenance and protection of Muslim refugees that an official camp was opened for them. When the Purana Qila camp was finally established, after an appeal by the Pakistani high commissioner it is said, the Indian government and the Delhi administration took no immediate responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the camp. There was a severe shortage of food supplies: and indeed quantities of food for distribution to the refugees were flown in from Pakistan, in British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) planes that were being used to transport Pakistan government officials to Karachi and that were returning empty on the flight to Delhi. A Pakistani army contingent was deputed for the defence of the camp. The government of Pakistan sent out several hundred tents for the accommodation of at least some of the refugees gathered here. Even the firewood that the inmates freely took from a large government godown just opposite the Purana Qila had been paid for by the Pakistan government, 'as we learnt later', writes one Delhi Muslim who was forced to spend several days in the camp (Dehlavi 1948: 168).[34]

It was after Gandhi had visited the Purana Qila camp on 13 September 1947 that the Indian government sent out the message clearly that these camps of Muslim refugees were also 'our' camps, and these refugees 'our' citizens if they wished to stay—fully the responsibility of the government of India. And it was after this, it seems, that Indian officials took over full responsibility for the supply of rations as well as for security at these camps (ibid.: 166).[35] It is a telling comment on the place assigned to the Muslims in the early days of independent India.

Perhaps Gandhi's arrival in Delhi was the turning point; perhaps his intervention gave to secular nationalist elements the moral strength they needed to renew the fight for the composite and tolerant India that so many had dreamed of; perhaps his very presence stunned the government and an army of stupefied Congress workers into gathering their wits about them, recognising their duty, and initiating moves for the restoration of peaceful conditions. In any event, with these new moves, accompanied by the work of the government's emergency committees which were already meeting daily to monitor developments, the transfer of large numbers of displaced Muslims to Pakistan, and the deployment of south Indian troops (who took a more neutral stand in the battle between Hindus and Muslims—

whether because this was a largely north Indian affair, or because of the different signals emanating from the government), the situation gradually improved.

At the end of October 1974—by which time, however, it was estimated that only 1.5 lakh of Delhi's 5 lakh Muslims remained in the city—those still here were reportedly disinclined to leave. In mid-October, hundreds of Muslims were returning to the Old City from the refugee camps, although some were said to be waiting until after the Hindu and Muslim festivals of Dasehra and Baqr Id which might produce fresh clashes, had passed on 23/24 October.[36] By 31 October, the number of Muslim refugees at the Humayun's Tomb camp was down to 4,000 from its high point of 63,000 or more a few weeks earlier, and the camp at Purana Qila had been closed. There were, however, still 1,000 or so Muslim refugees in Tihar village (now the site of Delhi's largest prison), some 6,000 at Chhattarpur, and others scattered through the shadows and ruins of Muslim monuments, mosques and graveyards from the Jama Masjid to Nizamuddin, Arab Sarai, Safdarjang's Tomb and beyond; and new refugees came in periodically from the country side or moved from one place to another in search of food, greater security or the hope of getting on a train to Pakistan.[37]

In November, again with Gandhi's active intervention, and not without some expression of dissent, the All India Congress Committee reiterated its commitment to building a non-sectarian, democratic India in which there would be place for people of all faiths. 'India is a land of many religions and many races, and must remain so . . .' The Congress aim was unchanged, the committee declared: to build a 'democratic secular state where all citizens enjoy full rights and are equally entitled to the protection of the state, irrespective of the religion to which they belong' (Gandhi 1983, 90: 537–38). But it was perhaps not till after the assassination of Gandhi that the Muslims of Delhi were accorded full rights as Indian citizens, and the equation between 'Muslim' and 'refugee'/'alien' was substantially broken—and then too, far from fully.

Gandhi's arrival in Delhi on 9 September 1947 has been likened by one Delhi Muslim to the arrival of the rains after a particularly long and harsh summer. 'Sukhe dhanon mein pani pad gaya' (Dehlavi 1948: 156). He had had exceptional success in maintaining the peace between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta, where a year earlier 4,000 or more people had been butchered on the city's streets within three days. Now many of Delhi's inhabitants looked to him to perform another miracle here. 'Delhi will now be saved', 'the Muslims will now be saved', Muslims said to one another in the Old City, Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi records. The speeches that Gandhi made at his daily prayer meetings were broadcast on the radio. And, we are told, from the day Gandhi arrived in Delhi, no further instance of major rioting occurred, although stabbings continued and Muslim houses and shops continued to be raided (ibid.: 156, 159).[38]

On 28 November 1947, on the occasion of Guru Nanak's birthday, when Gandhi went to address meeting of Sikhs at Sisganj Gurdwara, he saw not one single Muslim on the road in Chandni Chowk, the heart of Old ('Muslim') Delhi. 'What could be more shameful for us', he asked in his after-prayer speech that evening, 'than the fact that not a single Muslim could be found in Chandni Chowk?' The only Muslim to be seen was Sheikh Abdullah, the leader of the popular movement in Kashmir, and he was sitting beside Gandhi in the car (Gandhi 1983, 90: 127). In December, he spoke out against the continued attempts of Hindu and Sikh refugees to occupy Muslim houses (ibid.: 358, 373). The police were now more active in seeking to protect Muslims and their property, but this was not the 'heart unity' that Gandhi spoke of and longed for.

'If there is comparative peace in Delhi . . .', the London *Times* correspondent in Delhi wrote in early October, 'it is a peace based upon an intolerance which has succeeded in killing or driving out the minority almost to a man'.[39] It was good that because of the strong action taken by the government of India, people were no longer cutting each other's throats, Gandhi observed a fortnight later, 'but what of that?' 'There is [still] storm within the breast', he wrote two months later. 'I hear that even today [6 January 1948] people have been trying to get into the Muslim houses'. 'If it is our wish that Muslims should leave India [this on 20 December 1947], we should say so clearly or the government may declare that it will not be safe for Muslims to continue to live in India' (Gandhi 1983, 89: 366, 90: 408, 373, 266).

This was the context for the fast-unto-death that Gandhi commenced on 13 January 1948: 'I have no answer to return to the Muslim friends who see me from day to day as to what they should do' (ibid.: 408). In the event, the fast, and Gandhi's subsequent martyrdom, did work something like a miracle. The demand for continued partition, for the driving of every Muslim out of every part of Delhi, lost its immediate appeal; many Muslims were able to go back to their houses and mohallas, and perhaps for the first time since late 1946, the people of Delhi began to return to the business of living and of rebuilding lives, their uprooted city and their future.

The effect of Gandhi's fast was 'electric', wrote Azad. 'Groups which had till recently openly opposed Gandhiji came forward and said they would be prepared to do anything in order to save Gandhiji's precious life . . .' Qidwai in her turn recalls the 'contrition written on people's faces, a stoop in their walk, tears in their eyes': everywhere, she says, 'conversation was about Bapu's fast' (Azad 1988 [1959]: 236; Qidwai 1990: 107).

Jawaharlal Nehru, Arthur Moore (a former editor of *The Statesman*), and thousands of others, including a number of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan, decided to fast along with Gandhi, and broke their fasts only after Gandhi had given up his (Azad 1988 [1959]: 240; Gandhi 1983, 90: 449, 453). Outside Delhi too, the fast had a considerable impact: there were anxious enquiries about Gandhi's health even from across the border, and officers and ministers in the Pakistan government sought for ways to offer him support at this critical juncture (Gandhi 1983, 90: 424, 447, 461).

On the fifth day of the fast, 100,000 government employees, who had been to the fore in both pro-Pakistani and anti-Pakistani propaganda in Delhi since 1946, signed a pledge promising to work for peace and appealing to Gandhi to break his fast. The police signed a separate pledge (Qidwai 1990: 115). Among others who had more or less openly opposed Gandhi up to this point, representatives of the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha arrived with leaders of various Sikh and Muslim organisations, the Pakistani high commissioner, and the chief commissioner and deputy commissioner of Delhi (who signed on behalf of the administration) to pledge their acceptance of the basic demands set out by Gandhi and to urge him to now break his fast (Gandhi 1983, 90: 444–45).

M. S. Randhawa, the deputy commissioner, who in the view of many observers had played a less than honourable part in the preceding weeks of violence, even took a group of Hindu and Sikh leaders to begin repairs to the shrine of the 'sufi' saint Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Chishti, near Mehrauli, which had been desecrated in September. Other local societies and peace committees took up the task of repairing damaged relations in their own areas, and a Central Peace Committee was formed to coordinate moves to implement the written pledges given to Gandhi (Gandhi 1983, 90: 462n; Azad 1988 [1959]: 238). In the circumstances, Gandhi felt able to abandon his fast.

Twelve days later, Gandhi was assassinated. There had been another assassination attempt just a few days earlier—both the unsuccessful and successful attempts being the handiwork of Hindu extremists, angered (like many other Hindus and Sikhs) at Gandhi's supposed 'concessions' to the Muslims and to Pakistan. But the assassination had the contrary effect to what many observers—Indian and British, Muslim and Hindu and Sikh—feared, and what the Hindu Right might have hoped for, that is, a weakening of the secular elements inside and outside the government. Instead the government was forced to take more direct and purposeful action against communalist forces and associations. The RSS was banned, at least for a while; many of its leaders were arrested; the Rajas of Alwar, Bharatpur and other states which had aided and abetted, if not organised, the killing and persecution of Muslims, were pulled into line.[40] Hindi newspapers and other sections of the Indian press that had been conspicuously silent about attacks against Muslims on the Indian side of the border—in Punjab, Delhi, Rajputana—now began to report the incidence of such violence much more fully.[41]

Gandhi achieved through his death even more than he had achieved through his fast; and the tributes—from opponents as well as well-wishers—were fulsome.[42] Muslim recollections of the effect of his martyrdom are indeed extraordinary. 'Duniya hi badal gayi', more than one Muslim who was in Delhi at the time recalls. The assassination of Gandhi wiped out the blaze of Hindu–Muslim violence in such a way that 'the world veritably changed'. 'The fire of sectarian strife that had raged for months, or rather years, died down as if such strife had never occurred . . . Overnight, such calm was established, such a peace that one could not have dreamed of even a few days earlier'. The Muslims of Delhi felt secure now and 'returned to their normal occupations and routines' (Barelvi 1988: 119).

*Musalmaan ab azadi se ghumne phrine lage the* (The Muslims were now able to go around freely). *Sab kuch kho kar logon ko hosh aa raha tha* (People returned to their senses when they had lost everything). 'It was not only the administration and the atmosphere of Delhi that changed—for [public] workers and for the ordinary people the world itself changed'. 'Gandhiji made it possible for Muslims to continue to live in India' (Qidwai 1990: 162, 163, 278).[43]

This was the context for the letters and messages that many of Delhi's Muslims now sent to relatives and friends who had fled to Pakistan. 'There is peace now, and no danger of riots . . . You should come back' (Dehlavi 1948: 147, 180). The assassination of Gandhi, and the widespread reaction that it precipitated against the vicious cycle of senseless violence that the subcontinent had seen in the preceding months, thus marked a turning point in the demand to carry Partition further and make Delhi—and by extension, India—an exclusively Hindu/Sikh territory.

Yet it can be nobody's argument that these developments constituted a final resolution of the 'Muslim question' in India.[44] The ghettoisation of Muslims was carried further, even as many more Muslims returned to their homes in urban as well as rural areas. Numbers of Hindus and Sikhs continued to express their resentment at the Indian government's encouragement to Muslims to return to their homes and villages, even from Pakistan, when the fate of the lives and properties of the non-Muslims who remained in Pakistan was still uncertain. And there is evidence to suggest that for a long time after January 1948, large numbers of Delhi's Muslims remained alienated: every Muslim who could afford it wanted to get away to Pakistan somehow, Anees Qidwai noted in July 1948 (1990: 268).[45]

Reconciliation was not so easy 'after the war'. The bitterness remained, even among some of those who applauded the efforts of Gandhi and Nehru, and with it the sense of being besieged that Partition had brought. It is to this, perhaps the most enduring legacy of Partition, that we need now to turn.

## IV

'Delhi has a long history behind it', Gandhi observed in one of his prayer speeches in October 1947. 'It would be madness even to try to erase that history' (Gandhi 1983, 89: 393). Yet, as historians of Partition and Independence, we have not felt it necessary to pay a great deal of attention to the specificities of that history, even when writing about Delhi. It is as if the site of an event is, at bottom, inconsequential—an inert, unchanging, unhistorical, unimagined and, therefore, meaningless container of 'history'. That is, however, not quite how the long-term residents of particular geographical tracts view their territories, and now how the old citizens of Delhi saw their city.

A brief report that appeared in *The Statesman* of 23 October 1947 points to several of the complexities involved in seeking to recover the history, and meaning, of 'Delhi'. The remains of a Mughal house, apparently dating back to the eighteenth century, had been unearthed in the Dhobiwara area of Dariba Kalan in Old Delhi. A mosque had at some point been constructed on a part of the foundations of the old house, the newspaper said. Presumably the debris at the site came from the collapse or destruction of the mosque. When this debris was cleared by local (almost certainly Hindu inhabitants) they allegedly found two stone images of Parvati and Nandi, wife and vehicle, respectively, of the great god, Shiva. 'The house has been converted into a little Shiva shrine [*sic*]', the report concluded.

This small news item conveys something of the layers of history that went into the making of Delhi as we know it, and something of the conquests and destruction that underlay its 'civilisation'. There is a great deal that is, almost necessarily, covered up here, a great deal that needs to be carefully unearthed. Recall Ahmed Ali's summary of the city's past in his novel, *Twilight in Delhi*:

> [Delhi] was built after the great battle of Mahabharat by Raja Yudhishtra [*sic*] in 1453 BC, and has been the cause of many a great and historic battle. Destruction is in its foundations and blood is in its soil. It has seen the fall of many a glorious kingdom, and listened to the groans of birth. It is the symbol of Life and Death, and revenge is in its nature (Ali 1991: 4).

In such a scenario, 1947 may be seen as just another turning point in the cycle of history—harbinger of the postcolonial city, as 1857 had been of the colonial one. However, Muslim memoirs, fictional and non-fictional, have far more to say about the character of that earlier Delhi, and lament its passing in particularly poetic terms. *Dilli Musalmanon ka shahar tha* (Barelvi 1988: 18). Delhi was a city of the Muslims, a Muslim city—unparalleled in the subtlety and beauty of its culture or the grandeur of its public displays. The streets of Old Delhi were so busy and crowded that it was difficult to walk on them, writes Ebadat Barelvi. *Yahan khoye se khoa chhilta tha*. 'From morning to night, there was such gaiety at the Jama Masjid that it brought to mind the age of Akbar and Shah Jahan' (ibid.: 13).[46]

Ahmed Ali, another citizen of that old world, and another Muslim from Delhi who was to end up in Pakistan, matches Barelvi's nostalgia in his explanation of his purpose in writing *Twilight in Delhi*: 'my purpose was to depict a phase of our national life and the decay of a whole culture, a particular mode of thought and living, now *dead and gone* already *right before our eyes*' (Ali 1991: viii [preface written in 1990]).

The proposition that Delhi was a 'Muslim' city bears a moment's reflection. When its older Muslim residents refer to 'Delhi', they refer by and large to the walled city of Old Delhi, Shahjahanabad which had been a centre of commercial and cultural activity ever since Shah Jahan built the spectacular palace complex called the Red Fort along with the Jama Masjid and other public buildings nearby, and laid out the great market complex around Chandni Chowk, in the seventeenth century. This was a 'Muslim' city in a quite tangible sense—built by Muslim rulers, full of grand Mughal monuments, and dominated by the Muslim aristocracy—even in its decline. It is noteworthy that the city so lovingly conjured up in *Twilight in Delhi* has virtually no non-Muslims in it: the only 'Hindus' who live in the city of Ahmed Ali's imagination, it seems, are men and women from the lowly dalit castes, whose services are required for sundry purposes on sundry occasions, and a modern medical doctor—predictably, a Bengali—who makes his appearance towards the end of the novel.

However, Delhi was a 'Muslim' city in another sense too, and in that sense not a city of Muslims alone or of Muslims in general, but of the cream of Muslim society. More precisely it was a city of elite Muslim culture—for non-Muslims and even sections of the non-elite might (and did) share that culture. In asserting that 'Delhi was a Muslim city', Barelvi immediately adds the rider that Hindus also lived here in large numbers: they were people providing numerous services, businesses and capital, they were also moneylenders, bankers and landlords. However, he adds, most of the Hindus shared the culture of the Muslims. 'They [dressed and] spoke like Muslims'; they shared the same festivities and etiquette, and they thought of Urdu as their own tongue (Barelvi 1988: 18).

That Delhi was a 'Muslim city' is another way of saying, as these accounts do over and over again, that Delhi was a 'cultured' city. Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi notes in his detailed memoir of Delhi in 1947 that, for 700 years before that time, the people of Delhi (Hindus and Muslims) had never had to experience the vulgarity that was now everywhere. *Behayai aam hai.* Meat was now sold out in the open, women bathed in the streets, even the Hindu women had altogether stopped going out into the markets. *Dilli ab bhi baqi hai, aur vahan Musalman bhi baste hain, lekin ab vah dilli kahan?* (Delhi still exists, and Muslims live there too, but where is that Delhi of yore?) (Dehlavi 1948: 179, 189 for the quotations, and passim).

This nostalgia for the Delhi that was—*ek Musalmanon ka shahar*—finds it parallel, I suggest, in the Bengali *bhadralok*'s sense of Bengal as a quintessentially Hindu bhadralok province, not in numbers (at least not since the censuses of 1872 and 1881) but in terms of culture and history. It was a culture and history that, in the bhadralok's reckoning, they had built. These worlds—of the older elites of Delhi and Bengal—shared a good deal in common, although they had their own idiosyncracies and concerns. What were the distinguishing marks of that old world culture? In Delhi they spoke of a leisured pace, of inherited status and breeding, self-respect and hospitality, shared poetry and subtle conversation, innocent diversions like kite-flying and pigeon keeping, and with all that, of clear hierarchies—between man and woman, father and child, master and servant high-born and low.

That world was not likely to survive in the face of colonial capitalism, the spread of an economic rationality and modern science and, accompanying these, new ideas of nationalism and democracy. It was destined to pass. Yet the process of passing—the death of the old and the birth-pangs of the new—deserves analysis: that is perhaps where 'history' is to be found. Ahmed Ali, writing *Twilight in Delhi* in the late 1930s, laments the fate of his city as it comes under the sway of a corrosive, corrupting, commercialised and aggressive colonial culture. More recent Muslim writings had linked the collapse of that old world in Delhi more specifically to Partition, and more particularly to the violence of September 1947.

'Who can tell what evil spell the city came under as the sun of independence dawned upon its horizon? Such great storms arose that they shook this city of unparalleled grace to its foundations, destroying its prosperity and reducing its gaiety to nought', writes Ebadat Barelvi (Barelvi 1988: 19). 'We had heard accounts of the [1857] Mutiny from our elders, and also read the stories about that time written by Khwaja Hasan Nizami', recalls Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi. 'And we thought that such destruction had never before been visited upon Delhi, nor ever again would be. But [even] the devastation of [18]57 paled before the ravages' of September . . .' (Dehlavi 1948: 145).

'September' 1947 is a crucial month in the recollections of many Delhi Muslims. Ebadat Barelvi, then a teacher in the famous Delhi College (once known as the Anglo-Arabic College, and since renamed Zakir Husain College), spoke of it as follows in an interview done in the 1960s:

> Until about September 2 or 3, 1947 nothing much happened in [the vicinity of our college] . . . That area had a mixed population. Hindus were on one side, but at the time there were also a good number of Muslims. On September 4 I remember well that there was [major] trouble in Qarol Bagh . . . about a mile-and-a-half from our college . . .[47]

The dates vary—4, 5, 6 September—but we know from contemporary records and later accounts that the situation in the capital deteriorated sharply about that time: 'Qarol Bagh' marked a new stage in the violence in Delhi, moving beyond individual stabbings and looting to the systematic marking out of 'enemy' houses and shops and concerted attempts to drive out Muslims from every part of the city. The police too became openly partisan. Barelvi and his colleagues and students stayed on in their college for another few days, amidst sounds of incessant firing, rumours of large-scale violence and killing in one area and another, and increasing fear for their own safety.

Finally, on 7 or 8 September, they escaped to the Pakistani high commissioner's residence—for, as Barelvi records it, the high commission, with which telephone contact had been established by chance as some members of the staff tried to get through to a senior Muslim minister of the Indian government, had information of an attack on Delhi College planned for that very night.

> The next day the trouble escalated. We were . . . [in the compound of the high commissioner's house] and we heard that there had been trouble in Delhi University and that [the] dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi . . . and the Registrar, Akhtar Husain, were coming too and they were in a very bad state—just a pair of trousers and a shirt, no shoes even . . .[48]

Qureshi's own recollections of the period match Barelvi's. In July and August, he says in a memoir written in the 1960s, a 'feverish collection of arms' began in the Old City.

> The fortified mohallas . . . developed into arsenals. One could see that an undeclared and unofficial civil war was in the offing . . . At night the house tops began to bristle with armed men. This seems to have been a countrywide phenomenon and ultimately resulted in mass killings in many areas . . . (Qureshi 1970: 366)

In Delhi, the author notes, it became dangerous to walk through the main thoroughfares even in broad daylight, let alone at night, because of the ever-present possibility of 'hit-and-run' stabbing. Qureshi lived on the campus of the University of Delhi, several miles north of the Old City, but close to several new camps opened for refugees from West Pakistan, which were also areas of active recruitment for the Hindu right-wing organisation, the RSS. The arrival of Hindu and Sikh refugees in such numbers aroused a wave of sympathy for them and embittered Hindu/Sikh feelings towards the Muslims, writes Qureshi. 'Soon after armed Sikhs and others were seen roaming in and around the campus'.

'At last [in September] the inevitable happened'. Muslim inhabitants of Timarpur, about a mile from the campus, were attacked. As Qureshi recalls it, a Muslim recluse living in a deserted mosque near the university was killed, and the keepers of other mosques in the area fled. Soon after Muslims who worked in the orchards that stretched for miles around the university began pouring in to seek asylum in the campus; many of them had been attacked and killed in the orchards.

> That night was full of terror for us. We could hear screams of men, women and children who were intermittently being killed in their homes. Next morning the campus was attacked. There was no loss of life, but all Muslim houses were looted, one by one. Muslim students and teachers were evacuated with difficulty. We escaped in our car. Women hastily put on Hindu caste marks on their foreheads and put on Hindu clothes. I took them to the Pakistan High commission . . . (Ibid.: 367, 368)

'September' stands out not also in the recollections of some who initially observed Delhi from the sidelines. A striking example is provided by Begum Anees Qidwai of Lucknow, whose husband Shafi Ahmed Qidwai (a respected government official, and younger brother of the Congress leader and central cabinet minister, Rafi Ahmed Qidwai) was murdered while walking to his office in Mussoorie one day in early October. Anees Qidwai went to Delhi soon afterwards, wondering what she should do with her life until she began to work in the Muslim refugee camps of the capital at the bidding of Gandhi. Before that happened, however, and before her husband was killed, she had followed events in Mussoorie and Dehradun, Delhi and Punjab, from 'faraway' Lucknow: and she had had to answer many anxious queries from other Muslims of Lucknow and places in the vicinity who knew that she had well-placed contacts in Delhi and elsewhere.

Qidwai's memoir, based on a journal she kept from the time she began work in Delhi, has the same title as Ebadat Barelvi's—*Azadi ki Chhaon Mein* (In the Shadow of Independence).[49] She begins it with these words: *Sitambar shuru hua aur apne saath beesiyon balayen aur pareshaniyan lekar aaya* (September came bringing with it unnumbered troubles and misfortunes) (Qidwai 1990: 1). This is an opening chapter tellingly entitled *Karta hun jama phir jigar-i-lakht-lakht ko* (I gather together [or 'seek to gather together'] the scattered fragments of my heart). 'And then September came', she writes a few pages later. 'India had not been independent for fifteen days when violence and killing began in Delhi' (ibid.: 6). 'It all began in Delhi. The killing did not begin from anywhere else', recalls another high-status Muslim woman who lived through the terror of Partition in relatively safe eastern Uttar Pradesh.[50]

The longer-term residents of Delhi were persuaded, however, that these troubles would pass. Delhi, they were convinced, would be protected from serious violence because it was, after all, the seat of the national government, and the government would maintain peace here at any cost. They were not entirely mistaken in this expectation: the government did try (though governments are made up of many parts that do not always pull together). In early September, when the crisis threatened to blow everything apart in both East Punjab and Delhi, Indian political leaders summoned Mountbatten back from Simla to help with his military experience in what was nothing short of a war situation (Pyarelal 1958: 432). An 'Emergency Committee' of the cabinet was set up on 6 September, with parallel emergency committees for Delhi and East Punjab: and Mountbatten's comment in one of the early meetings, 'If we go down in Delhi, we are finished' (Pyarelal 1958: 433),[51] sums up the urgency felt by the government. In any case, these streamlined agencies at the centre of government ensured that decisions on policy matters were taken in the shortest possible time and that they were implemented as far as possible; and they contributed significantly—along with other forces that have been noticed earlier—to containing the violence.[52]

Muslims in the Old City had also been reassured by their Hindu neighbours that, come what may, they would defend their Muslim brothers and sisters to the last. And in many instances they did. Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi, who has given us one of the most detailed and vivid accounts of the violence of this period in his *Dilli ki Bipta* (The Misfortune [for 'calamity'] of Delhi), provides a touching example of this in his description of events in Khari Baoli, a predominantly Hindu mohalla, where his mother lived with a handful of other Muslims.

In the late 1930s, Shahid Ahmad had bought a house near the Jama Masjid and moved into it. But his family still owned two houses in Khari Baoli, his mother lived in one (the *zanana ghar*), and Shahid Ahmad maintained his press and office in the other, two doors away. *Jab Dilli mein hangama hua*: when the disturbances broke out in the Old City on 5 September[53]—a bomb was thrown at the Fatehpuri Mosque, crowds gathered, the police opened fire, one or two people were killed and several injured in the exchange, local militias formed on both sides, slogans were raised and people began running helter-skelter—Shahid Ahmad was caught in his office in Khari Baoli. Amidst rising tension, he and his co-workers managed to escape through back-ways and alleys that they knew reasonably well. But they breathed freely again only when they reached the point from where 'Muslim habitation' started. *Bas us din se aaj tak dobara Khari Baoli jaana naseeb nahin hua*. Shahid had hoped to return to his office within a day or two, at least to sort out some urgent papers, but 'from that day to this, I have never been able to go back to Khari Baoli' (Dehlavi 1948: 151).

While Shahid and his colleagues fled from this Hindu locality on 5 September, his mother refused to leave. Conditions worsened in the following days, however, and she was forcibly taken away by relatives to the nearby Muslim area of Farash Khana. The very next day, Hindu elders of Khari Baoli went to Farash Khana and pleaded with the old lady to return to her home; her departure amounted to a slur upon them and upon the whole mohalla. No one would be allowed to touch a hair of her head as long as they lived, they declared. *Jab tak hamari jaan mein jaan hai, aap par anch nahin aa sakti* (ibid.: 147).

Shahid Ahmad's mother returned to Khari Baoli and was still living there, along with his younger brother and sisters, when he wrote his memoir sometime after he and his immediate family had moved to Pakistan. 'Not a single Muslim was killed in Khari Baoli', writes Shahid, 'and my mother is still there'. Indeed, once relative calm had been restored, his mother urged him to come back. 'She writes to us saying that all of us fled unnecessarily: "you should come back now" . . . This is but a trifling example of how Delhi's Hindus behaved towards Delhi's Muslims' (ibid.: 146–47, 180).

Shahid Ahmad's major diatribe is reserved for those Hindu and Sikh refugees who had flooded into the city from outside. The refugees, and especially the Sikhs, seemed to be everywhere. They had taken over the streets and the footpaths, the deserted buildings, the mosques and the graveyards. Every bazaar now had several bazaars in it, because the refugees had set up stalls and platforms on the footpaths and on the streets to sell all kinds of goods. Chandni Chowk now had seven markets, Shahid Ahmad noted when he returned to Delhi after seven months in Pakistan, in April 1948: two *asal* (real or original) and five 'set up by the refugees' (ibid.: 186, 188). 'Nothing remained of that speech and that etiquette', as Shahid's fellow Delhiwala, Ebadat Barelvi, put it, 'that generosity and that humanity, that warmth and that colour by which Delhi once used to be recognised' (Barelvi 1988: 150).

The newcomers were prepared to do anything to make a paisa, we are told, and resorted to violence on the slightest pretext. The 'Hindus of Delhi' and the 'Muslims of Delhi' both suffered at their hands, writes Shahid Ahmad: and 'in the riots that followed, the Hindus of Delhi took no part' (Dehlavi 1948: 146). His own evidence suggests otherwise, however, and because of that Shahid adds a significant rider: 'except for those who were carried away by a religious [read "communal"] madness' (ibid.).[54]

In spite of the fondness with which some of Delhi's Muslims recalled the community that was once Delhi, huge numbers—indeed nearly all of the city's Muslim community—were a besieged, demoralised and terrified lot by August–September 1947. Curfew had begun to be imposed much earlier. Now they lengthened into seemingly interminable periods. When the curfew was lifted for a few hours, there was a desperate rush for supplies. Food and other necessities soon ran out, black-marketing and cheating increased, people began selling whatever they had in their possession and searched for alternative sources of sustenance: poorer Muslims even began to sell, and to eat, their pet sheep, goats and ponies (ibid.: 149). Muslims discovered too, as we have noticed, that the local police had turned against them, or were at best somewhat indifferent. It is scarcely to be wondered at that much bitterness and rethinking have flowed from these experiences.

## V

Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi's *Dilli ki Bipta* is a detailed, moving and bitter account of how he was forced to leave a city he had never contemplated leaving. Delhi was his home, his city, his *vatan*. 'The scars of this forced separation will never disappear', he writes. It was like torture, like nails being pulled out of the flesh (*Dilli ka Dilli-valon se juda hona gosht se nakhun ka juda hona hai*). 'Delhi which had now become like a dayan [witch] . . . even though she had become a dayan, she still remained a mother' (ibid.: 179–80).

He had no intention of leaving Delhi, Shahid tells us. His mother and his siblings, the family property, his work, his home was all there. *Dilli mujhse bhala kaise chhoot sakegi?* 'How would I ever be able to leave Delhi?' he asked himself. And he exhorted the people of his locality to stay put, reassuring them in whatever way he could. But then, as the curfews lengthened, the shouts of arsonists and looters drew nearer, food and water became scarce, the streets and houses grew smaller, and the very act of sleeping and breathing became difficult, people of the mohalla began to slip away quietly making their way to the Old Fort or wherever else they might find security.

One day, not long afterwards, Shahid and his family left too—with whatever belongings they could quickly pile onto a truck. People in the mohalla remarked, *Babuji bhi chale*; and 'I walked with my head bowed, guiltily, like a criminal' (ibid.: 164). They went to the Old Fort refugee camp where conditions were, if anything, worse than where they had come from: perhaps 80,000 people crowded into the grounds, with a handful of tents to accommodate a few lucky ones;

one tap with running water, as the writer describes it; no provision for lights, lavatories or bathrooms, and heavy rains to compound the conditions of dirt and disorder (ibid.: 165).

It is noteworthy, though scarcely surprising, that Ebadat Barelvi and Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, writing their memoirs in two different tongues, Urdu and English, respectively, should use exactly the same metaphor for the Delhi they left behind in 1947–48. The penultimate chapter of Barelvi's *Azadi ke Saaye Mein* (1988) is titled *Rukhsat-i-Zindaan* (Liberation from the Prison House). The city of Delhi had become 'a prison for the Muslims', writes Qureshi (Qureshi 1970: 367). Qidwai personalises the city with another metaphor of devastation. *Aktubar–Navambar ki Dilli ek khoon mein lithdi hui laash thi* . . . 'The Delhi of October–November [1947] was a corpse bathed in blood, over which hundreds of vultures and kites continued to hover . . .' (Qidwai 1990: 22). *Purana Qila hashr ka maidan bana hua tha*, wrote Shahid Ahmad (Dehlavi 1948: 165).

Liberation from this place of incarceration and death became the primary concern of very large numbers of Muslims. Many who could leave the city or the country did so—among them, Ebadat Barelvi, Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi and Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi. But the bitterness of being hounded out, hunted and humiliated remained, for them as for those who did not have the resources or the connections to take them very far.

Tens of thousands had become refugees in their own homes and mohallas before they escaped to the refugee camps. Something of their sense of helplessness and despair may be judged from their response to Gandhi, who had until a little while before been widely portrayed as an enemy of Islam. We have one account of this in Shahid Ahmad's *Dilli ki Bipta* (1948).

The man whom Shahid Ahmad likens at one point to the coming of rains on a perched crop—*sukhe dhanon mein pani pad gaya*—appears in a far less favourable light in his more detailed ruminations. When Gandhi visited the Jama Masjid on 12 September, the news of his impending visit spread among the Muslims like wildfire. Thousands of them assembled to see him, and there was no chance of offering prayers in the mosque, writes Shahid. There was a great commotion as soon as Gandhi arrived. The assembled Muslims cried themselves hoarse, shouting 'Mahatma Gandhi *zindabad*!' 'At that moment, people forgot even Allah: they looked on Gandhiji himself as the omnipotent

(*Qadir-i-mutlaq*)' (Dehlavi 1948: 160). Such were the straits to which Delhi's Muslims had been reduced.

Gandhi himself stayed for a few minutes and said only a few words, because of the disorganisation, Shahid Ahmad's satirical account states further. However, his post-prayer speeches were broadcast on the radio every day. In these he repeatedly pronounced the Muslims guilty of atrocities in west Punjab, of abducting Hindu/Sikh women and much more. Having said this, he asked Hindus and Sikhs in Delhi to show their moral strength by not seeking revenge, and urged the Muslims to 'surrender all their weapons' and live as loyal Indian citizens (ibid.: 159–60).[55] 'For all that, the coming of Gandhiji did restore some calm among the Muslims', the writer observes, adding caustically: 'he even provided them some support. For example, he inspected their camps and advised them to construct and clean their own lavatories . . .' (ibid.: 160).

Ebadat Barelvi, who managed to escape to Lucknow in September 1947, and later wrote of the miracle Gandhi's martyrdom brought (when 'the world . . . changed' and it seemed as if 'strife had never occurred'), and who returned to his teaching duties in Delhi in April 1948, encouraged by Abul Kalam Azad, Zakir Husain and others as part of their effort to restore normalcy, reflected his own sense of loss and bitterness in his memoirs published 40 years later. Delhi had become a veritable 'refugee-istan', he recalls (Barelvi 1988: 150). The Delhi College was soon full of Hindu and Sikh students and professors from Sindh and Punjab—'good human beings' but of a culture far different from that the college was used to (ibid.: 135, 151). After Jinnah's death and the Indian government's takeover of Hyderabad in September 1948, Hyderabad became another scene of mass killing of Muslims and the mass rape of Muslim women, he writes. 'The eyes shed tears of blood (*Aankhen khoon-bahati rahin*)' (ibid.: 131).

Ultimately, after much deliberation and misgiving, Ebadat Barelvi left Delhi at the end of 1948. His migration to Lahore appears to him, in retrospect, as the moment of real liberation. 'Tears welled up at the thought that I was now in Pakistan. I had spent the year or 18 months prior to my arrival here in great mental anguish and vexation' (ibid.: 159). Once his family had also safely crossed the border, he writes further, he breathed even more freely: 'Now we would all live in Lahore, without any fear, and . . . pass our days in this pure and holy land in accordance with our beliefs and customs . . .' (ibid.: 172).

He dwells on the 'treasure of peace and security' that he found in Lahore that 'wealth of respect and honour', the desire for which had been eating into his soul for a long time (ibid.: 177). And he writes of the beauty of Lahore, the 'city of lights' and 'grace' and 'bounty' and 'romance', which now 'appeared to us like the land of fairies' (ibid.: 164). 'Delhi', that magical city was indeed now very far away: Lahore had become the new 'Delhi'.

Shahid Ahmad and his family escaped from Delhi too, within a few days of their arrival in the Purana Qila camp as soon as they were able to obtain seats on a train to Pakistan. *Dilli ki Bipta* describes the harrowing journey in some detail: conditions that were no improvement on the refugee camp they had left behind: 125 passengers crowded into a compartment meant to seat 32; no lighting or water; practically no chance of replenishing any supplies at stations on the way; attacks at one point; panic and terror and suffocation; what should have been an overnight journey taking all of 48 hours, which seemed to stretch endlessly.

The train ran the gauntlet, as the writer recalls it, from Nizamuddin station in Delhi to Meerut and Muzaffarnagar, Deoband and Rajpura, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar and a couple of smaller stations before they reached Pakistan. Hindus and Sikhs were milling around at every stop, but there were practically no Muslims to be seen. At Meerut, the military guard did not let anyone disembark to go get water, saying that it could well have been poisoned. At Amritsar and Beas stations, water was gushing out at full force from taps on the platform. However, the passengers were kept inside the train; there were thousands of Sikh and Hindu refugees at these stations, and a Sikh guard said sternly (if wisely), *Yeh Amritsar hai* (This is Amritsar).

Just before Ludhiana the train had screeched to a halt: and the passengers were locked in for over an hour, with all the doors and windows shut, while the troops guarding the train and reinforcements apparently rushed from Ludhiana fought off an attack by 'thousands' of armed men. In the course of the attack, three carriages were almost completely emptied: they arrived in Ludhiana laden only with corpses and a few grievously injured people; 'Hundreds' had attempted to flee from the train. Shahid Ahmad adds: they should also be counted among the dead.

The Muslims on the train breathed again only when they reached Jutto, the first station in Pakistani territory. *Murdon mein jaan aa gayi.*

Hundreds of people were waiting here, to greet them with slogans of 'Pakistan zindabad', and with generous supplies of drinking water and food—*roti*, *dal* and *achar* (Barelvi 1988: 169–78).

Six months after his journey to Lahore, Shahid Ahmad was to return to his native Delhi, with curiously mixed feelings of happiness and sorrow (*Ajeeb tarah ki khushi aur ajeeb tarah ka gham tha*) (ibid.: 15). 'Most' of Delhi's Muslims were by this time returning to Delhi from Pakistan, having heard of the restoration of peace, he recalls. But there were no houses left for them. The streets and the markets had been captured by refugee Hindus and Sikhs; and a Muslim seemed out of place even withdrawing money from a bank (ibid.: 182).

The Muslims of Delhi lived in fear, he says. They trusted no one and spoke in whispers, constantly on the lookout for 'informers'. Muslims were considered anti-national. Large numbers had been, and were being, arrested. Seeking to hide their Muslimness, some—especially younger—men had shaved off their beards. The few Muslim shopkeepers still in business tried to protect themselves by hiring Hindu/Sikh agents and workers (ibid.: 188–89). It was difficult to breathe freely.

The question of 'breathing freely', of living without fear, applied in these circumstances as much, or more, to those who stayed behind as to those who went away. The suffocation of Delhi in 1947–48, as Ebadat Barelvi, Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi and others recall it, was not altogether different from the suffocation of the train to Pakistan. No doubt many more of those 'refugees' who were left behind, or chose to stay on, in India or Pakistan, would have similar stories to tell, were their new national states tolerant of such tales.

In any case, Ahmad's experience—of breathing freely for the first time and tasting their first morsel of food for days on reaching the safety of their 'own people'—is recounted by many other Partition migrants, whether they travelled east or west.[56] The feeling of security, and the revival of spirits that came with the thought that they were now on their own 'national' soil, is a common theme in the migrants' recollections. So is the memory of the excessive aggression and counter-aggression all around.

The Sikh military guard's warning to Shahid Ahmad and his Muslim co-passengers, *Yeh Amritsar hai*, is matched by Bhishma Sahni's physically unimpressive Hindu babu fleeing the other way, who is transformed into a marauding wolf as soon as his train nears

Amritsar; *Amritsar aa gaya.*[57] Very much the same kind of account of immediate vengeance is provided by refugees travelling in both directions. Shahid Ahmad's train journey ends at Lahore where, he recounts, sections of the waiting crowd proceeded at once to determine whether the train had been attacked and how many had been killed or wounded. They then promised summary justice. 'Wait!', they said, according to Shahid Ahmad, 'we shall settle scores right now, in your presence': and, stopping a refugee special going the other way at Baghbanpura station just outside Lahore, they paid back the killers of eastern Punjab in their own coin—'with interest' (Dehlavi 1948: 176–77).

## VI

This is a Partition (Partition-Independence) that we have not always faced up to in our history writing and our public representations of that moment of 'liberation'. What a focus on the Muslims of a disturbed and high-profile place like Delhi in 1947–48 may allow us to do is to recover something of the suppressed memories of Partition and Independence, at the same time as we ask something about the way in which the history of these events has been written up.

One point that I hope this paper will have established is that there are moments in the modern history of nations—unfortunately, indeed, too many of them—when whole communities come to be refugees, and the members of an entire population (or section of a population) are rendered faceless, undifferentiated, suspect and hunted. This is what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany. This is what has happened to the Hututsi in Rwanda over the last few years. This is what happened in Delhi and its environs, as of course it did elsewhere in India and Pakistan, for many months in 1947 and afterwards.

Large numbers of people became 'refugees' in 1947–48, some moving to another country, some not moving very far or indeed leaving their homes at all. The point of arrival for many of the latter was, in a physical sense, no different from the point of departure: but in a physical sense alone. The question that remains for a long time is that of their place in the new dispensations of India and Pakistan (now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), and of their—and our—ability to deal with this tormenting history of displacement.

## NOTES

1. My focus on Muslim refugees does not imply that the experience of Hindu and Sikh refugees was any less traumatic, in Delhi, or elsewhere. The latter requires detailed treatment in its own right: and every such enquiry needs to pay close attention to the way in which memories have been constructed—by different participants.

2. Interview, Delhi, 18 March 1995 (name withheld at interviewee's request); Tandon (1968: 249).

3. India Office Records (hereafter IOR) R/3/1/172, Mountbatten to Baldev Singh, 2 September 1947, and Mountbatten to prime minister, 2 September 1947.

4. Interviews with Mohammad Khalid and Rashiduddin Khan, published in *Deshkaal*, August 1996, pp. 21–22. For the force of Rashiduddin Khan's remark, note Mountbatten's reactions referred to previously.

5. Interview with Atam Singh, Bhogal, 16 March 1947.

6. Interview, Delhi, February 1995.

7. Mushirul Hasan (1997: 173 and n) observes that the Muslim population was reduced from 33.22 per cent to 5.71 per cent of Delhi's total population between 1941 and 1951.

8. The 1980s and 1990s have seen a rapid transformation of the city. Much of Delhi now gives the appearance of being a city of the upwardly mobile, aggressive commercial bourgeoisie—'Non-Resident Indians' living in India.

9. *The Statesman*, 23 August 1947; IOR R/3/1/174, G. H. Nicholls' 'Note' to the Governor General, 27 October 1947; *The Times*, 21 January 1948.

10. India Office Library (hereafter IOL) Mss Eur F164/21, 'Statement . . . by Military Officer on September 21, 1947', p. xxxviii.

11. Ibid., pp. xxxviii–xl.

12. IOL Mss Eur F164/149, Malik (1948: 19); IOL Mss Eur F200/53, Minutes of Meeting of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, 7 October 1947. Cf. Mss Eur D621/14, Wilfrid Russell diaries, entry for 1 October 1947; Qidwai (1990: 56); and extract from Ralph Russell's interview with Ebadat Barelvi, published in *Seminar*, vol. 420, August 1994.

13. IOL Mss Eur F164/21, Appendix VII. 'A Statement on Delhi Disturbance Made by a Military Officer on September 21, 1947', p. xliii; IOL Mss Eur F164/149, Malik, *Tragedy of Delhi*, pp. 21, 25.

14. IOL Mss Eur F200/165, 'The Indian Situation: A Personal Note' by Lord Ismay, 5 October 1947. Cf. Ismay (1960).

15. *The Statesman*, October 1947.

16. Mss Eur F200/165, Ismay's note. 'The Indian Situation'.

17. Mss Eur F164/21, 'Statement on Delhi Disturbances', pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

18. *Dawn*, 27 August 1947.

19. 'Statement on Delhi Disturbances', p. xxxviii.

20. *News Chronicle*, 6 September 1947, cited in Malik (1948: 5).

21. 'Statement on Delhi Disturbances', pp. xxxix–xl.

22. Nehru did this so often during these days that several people in his own office and in other branches of the government were deeply concerned about his safety; interview, Azim Husain, Indian Civil Service (ICS), London, 12 October 1995; *People's Age*, 19 October 1947; Dehlavi (1948: 157).

23. This paragraph is based on reports in *The Statesman*, 8 September 1947.

24. *The Statesman*, 1 October 1947.

25. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML) CID records, Vth Instalment, file 136/1947, Casual Source Report of 27 September 1947; IOL Mss Eur F200/52, Minutes of Meeting of Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, 24 September 1947.

26. For such propaganda and activities in Lodi Colony, for instance, see, for example, NMML CID records, Vth Instalment, file 78; National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Home Poll 5/6/46, Home Poll (1) 33/26/46, Home Poll (1) 5/7/47, etc.; and letters to the editor of *Dawn* through late 1946 and 1947.

27. Hindus and Sikhs were never restricted in their movements to quite the same extent as the Muslims, even during curfews, and even in the worst affected areas. Lamentably, the practice has largely continued into recent years; cf. Rai (1988).

28. Interview, Delhi, February 1995.

29. IOR R/3/172, Nehru to Mountbatten, Camp Lahore, 31 August 1947.

30. NMML Rameshwari Nehru Papers, 'Reports', file no. 1, 'Memorandum on the Recovery of Women' by Rameshwari Nehru, 20 June 1949.

31. *People's Age*, 7 September 1947.

32. All India Radio's Hindi and Pakistan Radio's Urdu have become mutually incomprehensible, and among the younger generations in India, Urdu seems to have become a language of the Muslims alone.

33. Qidwai adds in a footnote that the large numbers of Muslims from the Delhi countryside and from Punjab who lay around in the lanes and by-lanes of the city had never been to Pakistan nor, in her words, 'thought of going' (Qidwai 1990: 282n).

34. See also Barelvi (1988); and Qidwai (1990: 38), who provides somewhat different details.

35. The observation that these are Indian citizens would of course on become truer after the Pakistan government declared at the end of September that Pakistan was in no position to accept any more Muslims from Delhi or Uttar Pradesh.

36. IOL Mss Eur F200/190. 'Weekly Summary' for week ending 17 October 1947. In the event the festivals passed off quite peacefully in most parts of

India, with unusual public fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims being reported from cities like Pune.

37. Mss Eur F200/52, Minutes of Meeting of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, 31 October 1947; Mss Eur F200/190, Summary for Week ending 14 November 1947; Qidwai (1990: 277).

38. Cf. Gandhi's somewhat similar observations in Gandhi (1983, 89: 366, 374).

39. *The Times*, 6 October 1947; cf. Dehlavi's very similar comments on the re-establishment of 'complete peace' in one area or another, as the radio and press would have it (1948: 156 and passim).

40. IOL Mss Eur F200/2; *People's Age*, 15 February 1948.

41. IOL Mss Eur F164/31, Zaidi (1948).

42. Cf. IOL Mss Eur D621/15, Russell Diaries, entry for 31 January 1948; Mss Eur D833/43, Diary of Vincent Ellis Davies, ICS (Bihar), entry for 31 January 1948; also the tributes of Qureshi (1970: 368); al-Mujahid (1984, 4: 184).

43. Interview with Qazi Jalil Abbasi, who made the last quoted comment with tears in his eyes, New Delhi, 31 January 1995.

44. The history of the 1980s and 1990s would give the lie of that, if nothing else did.

45. For the change in Muslims' dreams in subsequent years, see my interview with Mohammad Asif Usmani and Syed Mahmud 'Ramz', Allahabad, 15 October 1994. For the special 'Muslim zones' that were informally established in Delhi for a while in 1948, so that Muslims might feel relatively more secure, see Qidwai (1990: 200, 209–10); for Muslims returning to their villages, see Qidwai (1990: 169, 192); Hasan (1997: 171).

46. Since the construction of a new capital city by the British called New Delhi, just to the south of the older habitation, the city built up since the time of the Mughals has come to be known as Old Delhi.

47. Barelvi's interview in *Seminar*, vol. 420, August 1994, pp. 36–37.

48. Ibid.

49. I should add that the title of Qidwai's original Urdu publication and the Hindi translation is the same, and that Qidwai's *chhaon* and Barelvi's *saaye* are different versions of the same word, for 'shadow'. Page numbers provided here refer to the Hindi edition (1990).

50. Interview with Ruqaiya Begum, Allahabad, 4 October 1994. Ruqaiya Begum still lives in Allahabad; her brother, a senior government official, who was caught in Delhi in 1947, had to migrate to Pakistan.

51. Cf. page headline in the Communist Party paper, *People's Age*, 21 September 1947: 'Defend Delhi! Defend India!!'

52. Mss Eur F200/165, Ismay, 'The Indian Situation'. See also Mountbatten's egotistical interview in Collins and Lapierre (1984: 20, 31).

53. The details here are taken from Dehlavi (1948) and (NAI) Home Poll(I), file 5/26/47.

54. See also his evidence relating to the part played by 'untouchable' Hindus in the violence in the Kali Masjid area (Dehlavi 1948: 159).

55. Gandhi's speeches in fact appear to me more cautious and anguished, but this is how they are recalled by Shahid Ahmad.

56. This has been the case in numerous interviews that I have conducted with Partition migrants. See also Kamlabehn Patel's account of her feeling of claustrophobia each time she had to go out on the streets of Lahore, while she worked there in the abducted women's recovery programme, and her relief and joy when she went to Amritsar, translated excerpt from *Moon Sota Ukhdela*, published in *Seminar*, vol. 420, p. 40; and Barelvi's recollections cited here.

57. See Sahni (1987); also accounts of changed direction of violence on discovery that a particular place was to be part of India rather than Pakistan, or vice versa.

CHAPTER 3

# Picking up the Pieces

## Pakistan, 1947–49

Ian Talbot

Pakistan's birth was a difficult one which involved the immense suffering of thousands of its citizens. Its British midwife had abandoned it to a chaotic environment in which an elder Indian sibling looked on with scarcely disguised hostility. In such circumstances, historians appear slightly perverse in directing more attention to how Pakistan was conceived, rather than to why it was not stillborn. Furthermore, the question arises whether the medicine administered to the fledgling state carried long-term side-effects that stunted its democratic development (Jalal 1995b: 23). Before addressing these questions it is necessary both to delineate the features of the new-born state and to describe the traumas which surrounded its arrival into the world.

## THE ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL INHERITANCE

From a political standpoint, the most significant features of Pakistan's geography in 1947 were its relatively small share of the Indian subcontinent and the contrasts and distance both within and between its western and eastern wings. Pakistan was by no means a small country, with a combined area almost four times that of the United Kingdom (UK), or equal to that of Texas and Arizona in the US, but it was dwarfed by its Indian neighbour. It had in fact inherited 23 per cent of the land mass of undivided India and 18 per cent of the population (ibid.). The disputes over Kashmir, the division of assets and water at the time of partition, increased anxieties about Pakistan's precarious geopolitical situation in relation to its much larger neighbour.[1] Furthermore, the Pakistani sense of inferiority and insecurity was psychologically rooted in the country's status as a seceding state rather than inheritor of the Raj. Membership of international organisations such as the UN had devolved upon India, whereas Pakistan had to go cap in hand to apply for membership.

Diplomatic and defence policies have been decisively influenced by the need to counteract this Indian regional preponderance. External alliances with the US[2] in the CENTO (1955) and SEATO Pacts (1954) and friendship with China[3] were successively called into play to help offset a strategic imbalance which worsened dramatically following the secession of East Pakistan. The emphasis on building an effective army and bureaucracy rather than representative institutions in the early years after independence was also rooted in this geopolitical situation. Wayne Wilcox and Stephen Cohen have linked the military's central role in the political decision-making process with Pakistan's unfavourable security environment, which has seen domestic policy much more influenced by defence and foreign policy than is usual (Wilcox 1972: 35; Cohen 1982: 93–118).

The Dominion of Pakistan started life not only with a strategic deficit, but also with an industrial one. At its outset it had an overwhelmingly agrarian society in which new definitions of land rights and the needs of imperial rule had strengthened the existing powers of elite groups. Capitalist farming had been unevenly limited to the irrigated areas in Punjab, Sindh and the Peshawar Valley of the Frontier. Elsewhere age-old nomadism and subsistence farming remained unaltered.

North-west India's status as what has been termed an 'agrarian appendix' to the subcontinent is revealed in the low rate of urbanisation and industrialisation. The 1931 Frontier Census for example enumerated the urban population at just 16 per cent, a figure which was itself inflated by the listing of large agricultural villages as towns.[4] Sindh recorded an urban population just 2 per cent higher[5] and even the more developed Punjab province remained essentially rural in character.[6]

Colonial industrial development had clustered around Bombay (now Mumbai), Ahmedabad, Calcutta and the West Bengal/Bihar coal belt. These areas all formed part of the new Indian dominion leaving Pakistan with just 10 per cent of the subcontinent's industrial base.

Significantly, in the areas which went to Pakistan in 1947, there was no equivalent of the giant TATA steelworks at Jamshedpur or of the concentrated industrial belts to the west of Calcutta. Indeed on the eve of partition just one of the top 57 Indian companies was owned by a Muslim (Markovits 1985). Hindus in fact owned the majority of the industrial enterprises which were in existence in the Muslim-majority regions. This, together with the traditional Hindu domination of trade and the professions, explains the disproportionately high non-Muslim urban populations[7] in the future Pakistan areas. The urban imbalance of the Hindus and Sikhs was especially pronounced in the southern towns of the Frontier and in the Thar Parkar and Hyderabad districts of Sindh. Karachi, which was the second largest urban centre in the future West Pakistan with a population just under 400,000, possessed a substantial Hindu population of over 130,000.[8] Cities such as Lahore and Peshawar had always been inhabited by substantial non-Muslim populations, but British rule enhanced the differences between them and their rural hinterland by creating administrative and professional opportunities for employment in addition to the traditional commercial and trading pursuits. Non-Muslims eagerly seized them because of their greater proficiency in English. Mohajirs mainly took over the running of Hindu-owned shops and businesses after 1947, although in some instances, former artisan employees or local entrepreneurs stepped into the gap.

Partition not only left most industrial development in India, but separated Pakistani raw materials from their markets. The main cotton-producing areas of what became West Pakistan, for example, had supplied the raw materials to mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Just 14 of the subcontinent's 394 cotton mills were located in Pakistan at the time of partition (Ali 1967: 334). It also emphasised the uneven capitalist development between the western and eastern wings of Pakistan. Punjab possessed two-thirds of all the organised industrial units situated in the Pakistan areas (Weiss 1991: 33). East Pakistan, which produced the bulk of the world's raw jute supply, did not in fact boast of a single mill since all the crop was sent in undivided India to Calcutta where it was made into hessian and exported. As British officials acknowledged before the partition of Bengal, East Bengal without Calcutta would be reduced to a 'rural slum'. During the 1950s and 1960s, East Pakistan was unable to overcome its relative backwardness at the time of Partition—with increasingly dangerous political consequences.

From this low starting base Pakistan's industrial development as a whole has been impressive,[9] as has been the exploitation of power potential, which was very limited at independence.[10] Despite the advance of both Karachi and Hyderabad, the greatest provincial concentration of manufacturing is today firmly established in Punjab. Within the province, Lahore and Faisalabad (formerly Lyallpur) retain their position as the major industrial locations, although there has been considerable growth in Multan (cotton ginning) and Gujranwala (metal engineering, electrical goods and textiles). There are still a large number of bazaar workshops, but the size of unit has increased. Manufacturing has also diversified from the colonial era, in which it was largely agro-related with the exception of the Sialkot sports goods industry, the Lyallpur textile industry and foundries like the Ittefaq concern which was jointly established by Nawaz Sharif's father in 1940. Nevertheless the shortage in electricity generation remains a major infrastructural weakness. While the poor economic inheritance at the time of Partition did not inhibit Pakistan's subsequent industrial development, the democratic deficit resulting from the legacy of a large feudal agrarian sector has proved more difficult to overcome.

Furthermore, Pakistan received but a meagre share of the Raj's material inheritance. In principle it was entitled to 17.5 per cent of the assets of undivided India, but the growing mistrust between the two governments prevented a smooth division of the spoils. It was not until December 1947 that an agreement was reached on Pakistan's share of the cash balances. The bulk of these (Rs 550 million) were held back by the Government of India as a result of the hostilities in Kashmir, and only paid on 15 January 1948 following Gandhi's intervention and fasting. Pakistan's military equipment was also delivered tardily by the Indians. Just over 23,000 of the 160,000 tons of ordnance stores allotted to Pakistan by the Joint Defence Council were actually delivered (LaPorte 1975: 36). Most of the defence production facilities and military stores in fact remained on the Indian side of the border.

## STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL INHERITANCES

Strategically and institutionally, Pakistan faced harsh challenges from its inception. Its eastern wing was separated from West Pakistan by

1,000 miles of Indian territory. This bred not only a sense of isolation from the centres of power but reinforced the existence of different world outlooks in the two wings with West Pakistan turning its face to the Middle East, East Pakistan to South-east Asia (McGrath 1996: 4).

Pakistan's north-western borders not only contained potentially troublesome tribal populations but were vulnerable to incursions from an unfriendly Afghan neighbour. The government in Kabul refused to accept nineteenth-century Anglo-Afghan treaties[11] which now demarcated its country's boundaries with Pakistan. It also expressed support for the Khudai-Khidmatgars' Pakhtunistan demands and voted against Pakistan's admission to the UN. Armed tribal incursions from Afghanistan into Pakistan's border areas began with the transfer of power and became a continual irritant. Afghan–Pakistan relations were to reach their nadir in 1955 when diplomatic relations were severed following the ransacking of the Pakistan embassy in Kabul, and again in 1961 when the Pakistan Army had to repel major Afghan incursions at Bajaur. By then the army had been greatly expanded, but at the time of partition it was too weak simultaneously to face an Indian and Afghan threat. This reality was immediately brought home by the necessity of employing almost 500 British officers because of the shortfall of qualified Pakistanis in the technical branches and at senior army rank. In the bifurcation of the Indian Army, Pakistan received just six armoured regiments to India's 40, and eight artillery and infantry regiments to India's 40 and 21 respectively (Cohen 1984: 7). The Pakistan Army was greatly expanded from its modest beginnings, but only at the cost of dependency on foreign aid and by siphoning funds from development activities.

The organisational atrophy of the Muslim League outside Bengal was a major feature of the freedom struggle. This institutional weakness contrasted with the pyramidal Congress organisation that stretched from New Delhi down to the villages. It was thus better placed to articulate local aspirations and implement policies than its Pakistani counterpart. Most importantly of all, as Ayesha Jalal has pointed out, the League's weakness meant that Pakistani politicians had to concede much 'greater autonomy to the administrative bureaucracy' to consolidate state authority than did their Indian counterparts (Jalal 1995b: 22).

India had inherited both the colonial state's central apparatus in the former imperial capital New Delhi and the Bengal provincial secretariat in Calcutta. Pakistan on the other hand had to improvise its federal government in the provisional capital at Karachi. The Constituent Assembly was housed in the Sindh Assembly building. Far more important than locating officials to Karachi and finding space to house them however, was the shaping of a new federal structure and coordinating the administration of the provinces and Princely States. A new provincial government also had to be created at Dhaka in East Pakistan. This task was especially difficult as the majority of the officials were Hindus and had opted for service in India. Indeed, of the 133 Muslim ICS and Indian Police Service (IPS) officials who opted for Pakistan at the time of partition, just one came from Bengal (Braibanti 1966: 49). Muslims from other areas of Pakistan were despatched to East Pakistan, although this remedy was to evoke later claims of internal colonisation.

At the same time as establishing a system of government literally from scratch, with ministers using wooden boxes as their tables (Sayeed 1968: 261), the Pakistan authorities were faced with the serious refugee problem that accompanied the partition of Punjab. The two-way mass migrations of August–November 1947 occurred against a background of horrific massacres, administrative chaos and mounting conflict between the two dominions over the division of assets, water ownership and water use and the political future of the northern princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Most of these problems remained unresolved at the time when Pakistan received the shattering blow of the death of its architect Muhammad Ali Jinnah in September 1948. Indeed as late as May 1960 the joint Indo-Pakistan Punjab Partition Implementation Committee was still grinding its way through various financial disputes, relating to government revenues, pensions of the victims of the 1947 disturbances, third-party claims and public investments.[12]

## MASSACRES AND MIGRATIONS

The magnitude of the refugee problem is brought home by the stark fact that Pakistan's 1951 Census enumerated one in 10 of the population, some 7 million people, as of refugee origin (cited in Sipe 1976: 73). While most refugees went to West Pakistan, the influx into the eastern wing should not be overlooked. At the time of the

1951 Census some 700,000 refugees were reported as residing in East Bengal (Wright 1975: 194). Two-thirds of these had originated in West Bengal and Assam, while the remainder were Urduspeaking migrants from Bihar and UP. Most refugees[13] had arrived between August and November 1947; at the same time, an almost equal number of Hindus and Sikhs had departed for India.

In the three-and-a-half months which followed independence, 4.6 million Muslims were evacuated from East Punjab alone.[14] The migrations were accompanied by horrific massacres which at the most conservative estimate claimed 200,000 lives.[15] The worst violence occurred in Punjab which had been partitioned along a line passing between Lahore and Amritsar. The other disturbed areas were the Punjab Princely States and western UP. Bengal remained largely peaceful despite the 'great Calcutta killings' and subsequent rural Noakhali violence and the uncertainties created by its own partition. Even such a prominent Muslim League politician as Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy continued to reside in Calcutta until 1949. Large minority populations remained in both East and West Bengal. The existence of a considerable Hindu minority in East Pakistan was another factor giving its politics a different flavour from that of West Pakistan. A further important legacy for East Pakistan of the Partition era was the presence of refugees from Bihar and UP who had fled the communal violence in their Indian homeland. Their attachment to North Indian culture led to increasing conflict with the indigenous Bengali elite. Those who were able embarked on the second migration of their life in 1971. Many remained 'stranded' in refugee camps and the issue of their repatriation emerged as a major demand of the mohajir movement in Sindh in the late 1980s. Indeed the Muttahida Qaumi Movement–Pakistan People's Party (MQM–PPP) Accord collapsed over the repatriation issue in October 1989 with dramatic consequences for both national and provincial politics.

The new Pakistan government was totally unprepared for the mass migrations and had not anticipated the violence which precipitated the flood of refugees. The demand for a separate Muslim homeland had not been linked with a call for movements of population. This was discouraged by the uncertainties over the exact boundary demarcation. Moreover, the so-called 'hostage' theory propounded the benefits of large minority populations in both India and Pakistan as a guarantee of communal stability. The only anticipatory migration which Jinnah had encouraged was the establishment of some ‘nation-building’ enterprises in the Pakistan areas. The future problems might however have been foreseen from the stockpiling of weapons in Punjab and its surrounding Princely States from the spring of 1947 onwards. Private Sikh armies[16] had sprung up often under the leadership of ex-Indian National Army (INA) soldiers in the wake of the attacks on the scattered Sikh communities of north-west Punjab in March 1947.[17] During the final days before the publication of the Radcliffe Boundary Award, Sikh raiding parties launched heavy attacks on Muslim villages in disputed ‘border’ areas of Punjab.[18] Shortly before independence, 5,000 Muslim refugees reached Lahore from the disturbed Amritsar district. They arrived in a city already abandoned by its Hindu and Sikh inhabitants following weeks of communal disturbances.

The causes of the Partition-related violence are complex and have evoked considerable controversy. Authors have debated whether Mountbatten should be held at least partly responsible because of his bringing forward the British departure from June 1948 to August 1947 and making inadequate security arrangements in the Punjab border areas.[19] The West Punjab Government apportioned the blame to the Sikhs,[20] while non-Muslims pointed accusingly at the role of the Muslim National Guards (Talib 1950). Boundary demarcation certainly played a part in Sikh violence as did the need for revenge following the earlier assaults in West Punjab. The publication of the Boundary Award added desperation to this desire for it involved the loss to Pakistan of the rich Sikh farmlands of Lyallpur[21] and the shrine of Nankana Sahib.[22] Indeed, shortly before the British departure, the Akali leader, Master Tara Singh, called for funds ‘for the forthcoming struggle’. He particularly emphasised that a territory full of Sikh religious places and properties should not be included in Pakistan at any cost and that Sikhs should enlist in *shahidi jathas* (Anon. 1948a: 26–27). They not only attacked Muslim villages in the Jullundur and Amritsar districts, but also the packed refugee trains heading for Pakistan. Many of the jathas operated from the safety of the neighbouring Sikh Princely States. The situation became so chaotic following the collapse of the civil administration in the East Punjab[23] that Master Tara Singh was forced to admit to India’s first Chief of General Staff that he could not guarantee Muslim refugees safe passage through Amritsar (Hodson 1969: 411). Reports of atrocities such as when Sita Ram, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Ambala, supervised an assault on a refugee train on 1 September which claimed 1,000 lives (Anon. 1948b: 29) created a cycle of revenge killings.

Punjabi Muslims launched reprisals against Hindu and Sikhs residents and also attacked those who were travelling to India. The worst violence was in Sheikhupura[24] where looting, killing and burning lasted 24 hours on 25–26 August. Two wells in the Namdhari Gurdwara were filled with the bodies of Hindu and Sikh women who had committed suicide to save themselves from assault (Talib 1950: 170). Elsewhere in the district, Sangla Hill and Sharakpur suffered much loss of life and physical destruction. Refugee trains passing through Wazirabad, Narowal and Raiwind were frequently attacked. Indeed, the railway track between Sialkot and Amritsar was strewn with Sikh corpses (ibid.: 191). The mounting disturbances sparked a massive exodus across the new international boundaries in the Punjab region. Within just 10 days of Pakistan's creation, an estimated 25,000 Muslims were streaming over from East Punjab each day.[25] On 5 September alone, 50,000 Muslim refugees arrived in Kasur on foot from Ferozepore district and the neighbouring Sikh states.[26] Three weeks later, 80,000 Muslims reached the Wagah border safely from Amritsar.[27] Caravans were visible from miles away because of the clouds of dust thrown up by the thousands of bullock carts. In the evenings their camp fires pierced the darkness. They were thus easily recognisable targets. Eyewitness accounts recall the bodies heaped on either side of the road from Amritsar to Lahore, converting the whole area into a massive graveyard.

In such cities as Delhi and Karachi the arrival of refugees sparked off disturbances against the local minority population. Riots in Karachi in January 1948 led to a belated departure of over 11,000 Hindus from the city. Events followed a similar course, though on a much larger scale, in Delhi where trouble began in and around the city early in September soon after the advent of the first fugitives from Pakistan. They instigated attacks on Muslim localities and in some instances forcibly seized property. As the native progressive novelist Shahid Ahmad, a wealthy native of Delhi, recalls in his autobiography *Dilli ki Bipta* (The Sad Tale of Delhi), Muslim houses in such suburbs as Karol Bagh were marked so that they could be identified by assailants. He also details the defence systems of gates on streets, guard groups and coloured lights—red if riots threatened, green as an all-clear signal—which the Muslims designed for their protection. When they had been evacuated, Muslims were herded into camps in places like Purana Qila and Humayaun's Tomb. The latter camp was bulging with over 30,000 refugees by December 1947.[28] Shahid Ahmad provides graphic details of the squalid conditions there.

The migration from Delhi and UP was, however, by no means the final chapter in Muslim refugee history. The Indian 'police action' in the princely state of Hyderabad in September 1948 led to a further influx of refugees to Pakistan. According to the 1951 Census there were 95,000 Hyderabadi refugees (Sipe 1976: 109ff). Muslims have in fact continued to leave India at times of communal tension, as for instance after the January 1964 Calcutta riots[29] and particularly in the wake of the wars of 1965 and 1971. Bouts of communal violence in East Pakistan caused a similar Hindu exodus. Violence in the Noakhali district in July 1962 was prompted by the arrival of Muslims expelled by the Indian authorities from Tripura state.[30]

The poor physical state of many of the migrants added to the Pakistan government's problems of resettlement. In the confusion, families had been split up, their womenfolk kidnapped and disgraced. Many refugees had been robbed of all their possessions by the East Punjab police. The sub-inspector of police at Sarhali, for example, extorted Rs 10,000 from the villagers of Kot Muhammad Khan as the price for a military escort (Anon 1948b: 31–32). The police looted trains to such an extent that the East Punjab Governor, Sir Chandulal Trivedi, exclaimed at a conference on 17 September that he would 'not be sorry if the army shot . . . those [police] . . . including their officers'.[31]

The squalid conditions in the refugee transit camps resulted in the spread of cholera and other diseases. The smell emanating from one of the biggest of these just outside Ludhiana was so bad 'that it continued for almost a mile down the road'.[32] According to K. C. Neogy, the Indian minister for relief and rehabilitation, there were between 100 and 250 deaths from cholera in one Muslim foot convoy from Rohtak alone, besides another 200 serious cases.[33] When the Pakistan Government complained about the lack of sanitation and low rations in such camps, Nehru was forced to concede privately that these criticisms were justified.[34]

The dramatic displacement of population in north-west India and the tensions generated by the Kashmir dispute should not be allowed to obscure the much slower but continuous migration in the northeast. A close reading of the British Deputy High Commissioner's reports for East Bengal during 1948 immediately dispels the view that problems were non-existent in this region. In addition to surges of Hindu migration despite repeated reassurances to the minorities, there were serious tensions between the West Bengal and East Bengal governments. Sporadic armed clashes erupted in the riveraine area between Rajshahi and Murshidabad throughout October and November 1948,[35] and the Pakistan border with Tripura was another flashpoint area.[36]

## THE POLITICAL INHERITANCE FROM THE REFUGEE SITUATION

The influx of refugees during the partition period was to possess long-term political consequences for Pakistan. It is necessary to note here three immediate consequences of the refugee situation: namely the politicisation of the resettlement issue caused by the need for refugee politicians to establish a vote bank in Pakistan; the tension between the Sindh and central authorities; and the differing experiences of mohajirs from Punjab and UP.

Refugee politicians from East Punjab were allowed to take up their seats in the new West Punjab Assembly but they needed to reassemble their former vote banks in order to survive in the long term. From July 1948 onwards, Chaudhri Muhammad Hasan led them in a vociferous campaign for district-wise resettlement. The East Punjab Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Rao Khurshid Ali took matters into his own hands and collected 50,000 of his followers in Montgomery from as far afield as Sindh and Bahawalpur.[37] The British Governor of the West Punjab sternly warned of the unthinkable consequences of making refugees who had only just settled move all over again. But the refugee Premier, the Nawab of Mamdot, supported by his Education Minister Sheikh Karamat Ali, vacillated on the issue of district-wise settlement. Two important consequences stemmed from this. First, the earlier spontaneous clashes between refugees and officials became more overtly political. In August 1948, for example, police had to lathi-charge 500 refugees who had blocked the road near the Police Superintendent's residence in Multan and had raised anti-Pakistan slogans in a procession carrying effigies of the Deputy Commissioner and Camp Commander.[38] In another incident in

Lahore, 2,000 irate refugees had marched to the Municipal Office and smashed cars parked outside it before vandalising the office itself.[39] Second, these disturbances, along with the problems in Sindh, led Jinnah in one of his last actions to authorise the declaration of a state of emergency regarding the rehabilitation of refugees. This was issued under Section 102 of the Government of India Act 1935 which served as Pakistan's Constitution. The centre had previously shied away from what was a provincial responsibility, and this summary action was to be one of a number of occasions early in Pakistan's history when a precedent was established for overriding provincial politicians.

The situation facing UP refugee politicians was of course even more difficult than that of their East Punjab counterparts. They had dominated the central organs of the All-India Muslim League but had no Pakistani base, or large numbers of tenants and labourers who could be relocated so as to provide them with one. In such circumstances they were reluctant to hold elections which would pitch them into obscurity. This in part explains the delay in holding national elections which would have revamped the Constituent Assembly. This delay, which was also rooted in the tensions between West and East Pakistan, was to provide an opening for the establishment of a non-elected bureaucratic authority. The uneasy relations between the Sindh government and the central authorities were another consequence of the refugee situation. The province's Premier, Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, strongly opposed the demand that Sindh should accept those refugees who could not be absorbed in West Punjab. By December 1947, Sindh had only resettled 244,000 displaced persons, while West Punjab had resettled over 4 million.[40] Its government that month agreed to take another 500,000 refugees provided that they were relocated in the Sukkur, Shikarpur and Mirpurkhas districts as Karachi was 'super-saturated'. Within a month Khuhro had reneged on this promise, declaring that Sindh would be unable to rehabilitate more than 150,000 refugees during the first half of 1948. This 'uncooperative' attitude was criticised by the West Punjab Governor. In a letter to Jinnah early in 1948, he cited census figures to demonstrate that Sindh had a net loss of 600,000 Hindu and Sikh agriculturalists and therefore should have no difficulty in meeting its responsibilities.[41]

Khuhro was severely upbraided by Raja Ghazanfar Ali, the Pakistan minister for refugees and rehabilitation, at a sub-committee meeting of the Pakistan Muslim League Council held on 23 February 1948. His defence that the local populace was suffering from the burdens imposed by the refugee influx was dismissed by Ghazanfar Ali as raising 'the virus of provincialism'. 'This is not only against the teachings of Islam and in direct contravention to the principle on which we fought for the achievement of Pakistan', Ghazanfar Ali added, 'but is a deadly weapon which if allowed to operate unchecked will destroy the foundations of our newly-born state'.[42] Khuhro's stance on the refugee issue was a contributory factor in his eventual downfall. It was to exert a much wider negative impact on Pakistani politics, for it not only strengthened Sindhi sentiment against the centre, but also encouraged the precedent of executive action against elected representatives. This boded ill for the future.

The differing experiences of mohajirs from UP to those from East Punjab and Gujarat is of crucial importance to an understanding of post-independence political developments. Linked with this is their self-image that they had sacrificed for Pakistan and were engaged on a true *hijrat* rather than being 'acute' migrants. The mohajirs from UP were in fact just a minority of the refugees who had left India at the time of partition. Three quarters of all the mohajirs were Punjabis (4.7 million). They were able to settle quickly in Pakistan and rapidly abandoned the 'mohajir' label. They did not have to make the linguistic and social adjustments which usually face refugees because they spoke the Punjabi language of the indigenous West Punjab population and entered an environment which was both climatically and culturally similar to that of their natal East Punjab villages. They settled on land vacated by the Sikh Jats and were thus enabled to continue their traditional agricultural pursuits.

Similarly Khoja and Memon migrants from Bombay entered a familiar environment. Karachi had formed part of the Gujarati-speaking coastal belt as a result of its administrative attachment to the Bombay Presidency. Some of the migrants had previously established business and family links. Even when this was not the case, they were able to step into the shoes of the former Hindu business class. Many Karachi enterprises that had been run by Gujarati-speaking Hindus before partition were controlled by Gujarati-speaking Muslim migrants afterwards.

Mohajirs from UP did not share the advantages of Punjabis and Gujaratis. There was no cultural region in the Pakistan areas similar to their North Indian home. Around 60 per cent of the 464,000 mohajirs from UP (Sipe 1976: 83) resettled in Sindh. The greatest concentration was in Karachi and Hyderabad, but a small proportion was dispersed in the towns of the interior. Some stayed in Karachi simply because they had been routed there by rail. On a less mundane note, Karachi was seen as an attractive destination because it was Pakistan's leading commercial centre and the initial headquarters of the Pakistan Government. It thus afforded better employment prospects for the mainly middle-class North Indian mohajirs than the rural West Punjab. Finally, it is possible that the mohajirs were discouraged from settling in Punjabi cities like Lahore and Multan because of their domination by the traditional landed elites, although this did not discourage settlement by refugees from East Punjab areas such as Jullundur and Amritsar. Whatever their motives, the North Indian refugees who came to settle in Sindh almost four decades ago have impacted dramatically on the 'local' culture, whilst retaining their own strong cultural distinctions.

Intizar Hussain's short stories reveal the melancholy attachment to a lost UP world which is felt by mohajir intellectuals. Emphasis on Urdu and its protection has remained a strong political element in community identity. The transformation of the dominant urban centres into Urdu-speaking enclaves within Sindh has created acute tensions. By the time of the 1951 Census, mohajirs accounted for 58 per cent of the population of Karachi, 66 per cent of Hyderabad, 54 per cent of Sukkur, 68 per cent of Mirpurkhas and 35 per cent of Larkana (Rahman 1995: 1008). The continued historical links with the role of UP in the freedom struggle are seen in the veneration accorded to Liaquat Ali Khan by some mohajir groups. The 1988 MQM-sponsored biography of Altaf Hussain quotes him as saying that '[e]very Government which came to power after Liaquat Ali Khan discriminated against the *mohajirs*' (Haq 1995: 997). The mohajir leader has also claimed that he and his supporters are the 'heirs' of the 'two million' minority province Muslims who sacrificed their lives: 'We have a right to Pakistan, and it is a right of blood, we gave blood for it' (Jalal 1995a: 83). Rather than abandoning their mohajir status, the Urdu-speaking refugees have adopted it as a source of ethnic political allegiance with wide-ranging implications. The cultural dissonance lying behind the politics of the MQM is starkly revealed by the depiction of its red, green and white tricolour in the shape of a *patang* (kite)—a reminder of a common north Indian pastime which is alien to Sindh (Richards 1993: 414).

Five additional points regarding the legacy of migration need to be made. The first is that concern with the mohajir Karachi crisis should not be allowed to obscure the importance of East Punjabi migrants in shaping the political development of the Pakistan state. As Muhammad Waseem has pointed out, the 5 million migrants have both provided a major support for Islamist parties and shaped the Punjab province's strong anti-Indian and pro-Kashmiri leanings. Support for centralist martial law regimes has also come from this quarter. The politics of Punjabi cities like Lahore, Sialkot, Multan and Gujranwala, of whose population around half were enumerated as migrants at the time of the 1951 Census, cannot be understood without reference to the refugee dimension. Delhi's politics have been similarly influenced by the presence of a large Punjabi Hindu migrant population.

The rising Punjabi industrial elite of the 1980s came largely from the migrant trading communities which had originated from Ambala, Batala, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. They prospered during the Zia era and provided an urban support base for Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League. 'Himself belonging to a Kashmiri migrant family', Muhammad Waseem has declared, 'Nawaz Sharif reflected a migrant ethos [and] his natural constituency lay with migrants from East Punjab and Kashmir' (1994: 163).

The second point is that in the realm of comparative politics little attention has been drawn to Pakistan's emergence as a settler/refugee dominated state. Surprisingly little has been made of this characteristic, although parallels are there to be drawn for example with the State of Israel.

Third, it should be noted that although Punjab as a whole did not suffer ethnic conflicts arising from refugee resettlement, where cultural differences coincided with economic resentment concerning the migrants, as in the south-western Siraiki-speaking areas, a similar political pattern emerged as in Sindh.

The fourth point concerns the migration experience and the establishment of a tradition of bureaucratic as opposed to parliamentary rule. Mohammad Waseem has maintained that the undercutting of parliament resulted both from the mohajir presence in the civil service and the loss of its political base. 'Recourse to elections', he states, 'was considered suicidal by the migrant-led government at Karachi because there was no way it could win elections and return to power in the centre. Elections were considered dysfunctional for the political system of Pakistan in the immediate post-independence period' (Waseem 1994: 32).

Finally, concerns with the uneven economic inheritances at the all-India level and their political consequences should not be allowed to obscure the regional dimension. Within the Punjab region, Hindus and Sikhs left behind not only more urban property than their Muslim refugee counterparts, but some 2 million acres of excess cultivable land. The East Punjab Government thus adopted a sliding-scale formula for allocating land to refugees (Randhawa 1954: 99). Shinder Thandi has argued forcefully that this encouraged new forms of risk-taking and more progressive farming methods as well as strengthening the political economy of owner-cultivation which has lain behind the greater agricultural productivity of Indian Punjab. As we have already noted, the legacy of the partition for the structure of land ownership in West Punjab was to sustain an agrarian system in which land was 'perceived to be a political rather than a commercial commodity' (Thandi 1997: 72).

## THE CRISIS IN INDO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The refugee situation formed part of a wider deterioration in Indo-Pakistan relations. Indeed, it played an important role—many Pakistani officials were convinced that the Indians were intent on making things impossible for them by pushing as many Muslims out of their country as possible. Certainly, Pakistani attitudes towards the increasingly serious situation in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir were influenced by the migration issue. Before turning to Kashmir we must refer to another area of Indo-Pakistan conflict—the Indus Waters dispute.

The dispute over water management and water-sharing between the two dominions reveals both the insecurity of Pakistan and the importance of administrative as opposed to political initiatives in solving its post-Partition problems. The British had never anticipated that it would be necessary to disentangle the intensive network of canals which drew water from Punjab's famous five rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab, Jhelum) and also from the Indus. The massive irrigation schemes that they had constructed from the end of the nineteenth century had transformed the desert of the West Punjab into one of the most prosperous farming regions in Asia. Pakistan's economic survival depended on the continued availability of water from these irrigation systems.

The Punjab Partition Council which met in Lahore from the end of June 1947 agreed that the existing apportionment of water resources from the canal systems should be maintained intact after independence. However, the Radcliffe Boundary Award which was not announced until 17 August placed the Madhopur and Ferozepur control points of the Upper Bari Doab canals, the Pipalpur canal and the Eastern Grey canal—all vital for Pakistan—on the Indian side of the border. Andrew Roberts has recently reopened the controversy concerning Mountbatten's role in the award of the Muslim-majority tehsils of Ferozepur and Zira to India with the consequent control of the Sutlej river canal headworks (1995: 93ff).

On 1 April 1948,[43] the East Punjab Government shut off water supplies to the Dipalpur canal from the Ferozepur headworks. This not only deprived Lahore of its main water supply, but put at risk 5.5 per cent of the sown area of West Pakistan at a crucial time in the agricultural year—the sowing of the *kharif* (autumn harvest crop) (Thandi 1997: 63–85). The Indian action was based on the claim that Pakistan had no right to the waters and would have to pay a seigniorage charge if the canals were to be reopened. Direct negotiations between the two dominions in May 1948 led to the restoration of the flow of water to the Dipalpur but not to the Bahawalpur canals. Supplies to Pakistan's canals were increasingly reduced by Indian construction of new canals and the raising of the capacity of the Bhakra dam (Michel 1967). Moreover, it proved impossible to resolve the impasse created by the contention that proprietary rights in the waters of the East Punjab rivers were vested wholly in the East Punjab Government. India refused Pakistan's offer to refer the legal dispute to the International Court of Justice.[44]

The tension between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue prevented a political breakthrough over the legal arguments concerning water ownership. The initiative thus fell to administrators such as Muhammad Ali[45] and S. S. Kirmani[46] to find a technical solution to provide insurance against the cessation of supplies from

India. This proved to be both costly and marked a further shift towards Pakistan's transformation into an 'administrative state'. The Balloki–Suleimanki, Bambanwali–Ravi–Bedian and Marala–Ravi link canals were sanctioned as was the Mangla Dam on which preliminary access work began in 1959. By the time of its completion it was the longest (11,000 feet) earth-filled dam in the world.

The Indus Waters dispute was only finally resolved in September 1960 partly as a result of the initiative taken by the World Bank. The Indus Waters Treaty created a permanent Indus Waters Commission and assigned the waters of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab to Pakistan. Internationally-financed link canals nearly 400 miles long transferred water from the above three rivers to areas previously irrigated by the water supplied from India by the eastern Ravi, Sutlej and Beas rivers. The scheme included in addition the construction of the Mangla and Tarbella dams.

## NOTES

1. Indian force levels not only outstrip those of Pakistan, but they are backed up by an indigenous arms-manufacturing capability that Pakistan lacks. The country's topography and main lines of communication further increase its vulnerability to Indian attack.

2. Before joining Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), Pakistan signed a mutual defence assistance pact with the US in 1954.

3. Close ties with China date back to the early 1960s. They were symbolically cemented with the opening of the Karakoram highway linking the two countries in 1982. Four years later, the countries signed an agreement for co-operation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

4. *Census of India 1931*, vol. 15, part 1, pp. 40–41.

5. *Census of India 1941*, vol. 12, p. 2.

6. In 1921, 60.5 per cent of the population was directly dependent on agriculture. *Census of India 1921*, vol. 15, p. 9.

7. In the Frontier, 74.5 per cent of the Hindus and 71.5 per cent of the Sikhs lived in urban areas in 1941. *Census of India 1941*, vol. 10, p. 20. In Sindh, there were 129 Hindus to every 100 Muslims living in urban areas, although they were outnumbered by 4:1 in the countryside. *Census of India 1931*, vol. 8, part 1, Ch. 11, Statement 24, p. 51.

8. This population largely comprised Gujarati-speakers from the Bombay region.

9. As a result of an industrial growth rate of 10 per cent per annum throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s, the industrial sector today contributes around 18 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

10. Natural gas was discovered at Sui in Sindh in 1955 and has become a major source of power.

11. The most important of these followed the November 1893 negotiations between Sir Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman, and established what became known as the Durand Line boundary between British India and Afghanistan.

12. American Consul Lahore to Department of State, 25 May 1960. 790D.00(W)6-162-790D 1/2-1060, National Archives at College Park.

13. The 1951 Census defined a refugee as a 'person who had moved into Pakistan as a result of partition or for fear of disturbances connected therewith'. The term 'mohajir' is narrower in meaning and can only be understood in the Islamic context of religious flight (*hijra*). Such flight is central to Islam and indeed the Muslim calendar is dated from the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. The term 'mohajir' was applied to the 'faithful who followed him'. It has since been applied to Muslims who have fled to preserve their faith and is encouraged by the Quran, Surah 4, Women: 'He who emigrates in the path of God will find frequent refuge and abundance'.

14. The exact figure given by Brigadier F. H. Stevens, commander of the Pakistan Military Evacuation Organisation, was 4,680,000. Quoted in *Eastern Times* (Lahore), 25 December 1947.

15. Sir Penderel Moon cited this figure in his work *Divide and Quit* (1961). The controversy concerning it has recently been reopened in Roberts (1994: 128–29).

16. Such as the Akal Fauj and *shahidi jathas* (martyrs' military detachments).

17. See Talbot (1988: 228). Forty thousand Sikhs had taken refuge in hurriedly established camps before being transported to the safety of Amritsar following disturbances in the Mianwali, Jhelum, Attock and Rawalpindi districts.

18. Punjab FR, 30 July 1947; 13 August 1947. L/P&J/5/250, IOR.

19. For a trenchant criticism of Mountbatten's role see Roberts (1994: 80ff).

20. See such publications as *The Sikhs in Action and The Sikh Plan* which were both published from Lahore in 1948.

21. Sikhs had acquired lands in the Canal Colonies which they had helped develop. On 13 September 1947, a convoy of 40,000 Sikhs left the Lyallpur Colony taking with them all they could load on bullock carts. *Civil and Military Gazette* (Lahore), 19 September 1947.

22. This was the birthplace of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak .The village of Nankana Sahib lies some 40 miles south-west of Lahore.

23. The British Governor of West Punjab wrote to Jinnah on 23 September 1947, 'that—the East Punjab Government has ceased to exist as a Government'. In such districts as Jullundur power subsequently lay not with the Deputy Commissioner, but with Sikh Committees of Action. Mudie to Jinnah, 23 September 1947, Mudie Papers Mss.Eur.F164/15, IOR.

24. Non-Muslims formed around a third of the population of the Sheikhupura district. The Sikhs had played an important role in its agricultural development and the district of course contained the Nankana Sahib birthplace of Guru Nanak. The resistance put up by the Hindu and Sikh villagers of Bhullair has been commemorated in folk songs and stories (Randhawa 1954: 15).

25. *Eastern Times* (Lahore), 26 August 1947.

26. *Eastern Times* (Lahore), 9 September 1947.

27. *Eastern Times* (Lahore), 2 October 1947.

28. Report of A. S. Bhatnagar, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, 4 December 1947. MB l/D276 Mountbatten Papers, University of Southampton.

29. Communal tensions were high in the subcontinent at this time over the Hazratbal episode. The violence in Calcutta had been preceded by conflict in Khulna and Jessore in East Pakistan. Within a few days of the violence in Calcutta, 20,000 Muslims had crossed into East Pakistan. American Embassy, Karachi, to Department of State, 17 January 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964–6, Political and Defence Pol 27-2, National Archives at College Park.

30. American Consul Dacca to Department of State, 12 July 1962, 790D/007/-1162, National Archives at College Park.

31. Report of Colonel Sher Khan, Administrative Headquarters, Military Evacuation Organisation Amritsar, 24 September 1947, Mudie Papers Eur.F 164/15, IOR.

32. Ibid.

33. Extract, Minutes, 27th Meeting Emergency Cabinet Committee, MB 1/0276, Mountbatten Papers, University of Southampton.

34. Indian High Commissioner to Commonwealth Relations Office Cypher, 27 October 1947. East Punjab Affairs 1947–8, Weekly Reports G 2275/14 Do. 35 3159, Dominions and Commonwealth Relations Office, Public Record Office (PRO).

35. Deputy High Commissioner's Report for East Bengal for the Period ending 31 October 1948; 20 November 1948; 27 November 1948, LP&J/5/323, IOR.

36. Ibid.

37. Mudie to Jinnah, 5 August 1948, Mudie Paper Eur. F 164/15, IOR.

38. Mudie to Jinnah, 20 August 1948, Mudie Papers Eur. F 164/15, IOR.

39. Ibid.

40. *Dawn*, 12 December 1947.

41. Mudie to Jinnah, 4 February 1948, Mudie Papers Eur. F 164/15, IOR.

42. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 25 February 1948.

43. Although the apportionment of water supplies had not been referred to the InterDominion Arbitral Tribunal, it was no coincidence that the water dispute began the day after it had been wound up.

44. The Indian government made the counter offer in September 1950 of submitting the issues to a court of two Indian and two Pakistani judges.

45. For an insight into Muhammad Ali's role and approach, see Ali (1967, chapter 15).

46. Kirmani was Director of Central Designs in the West Punjab Irrigation Department. For his role see Michel (1967: 284ff).

# PART II

# DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICS

CHAPTER 4

# 'The Road Not Taken'

## Sir Benegal Narsing Rau and the Indian Constitution

Arvind Elangovan

## INTRODUCTION

In the years leading to the emergence of postcolonial India, a little-known civil servant, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau (1887–1953), rose to prominence and enjoyed immense trust and faith in the highest echelons of colonial bureaucracy. Trusted equally by the British and Indian leadership at moments of political and constitutional crises, what made B. N. Rau a compelling voice to heed was not only the fact that he was an exceptional civil servant (and indeed Jawaharlal Nehru even went to the extent of remembering him as a 'perfect civil servant') but it was also his tireless ability to always rise above the pressures of partisanship in order to provide a reasonable solution.[1] Moreover, in providing such an impartial perspective, Rau simultaneously imbued his work with an idealism that was quite unexpected of a civil servant. Rau's life and career then becomes an irresistible window from which to critically view the years of transition from colonial to postcolonial India. Such a perspective is critical because I suggest that Rau through his bureaucratic interventions critiqued colonialism and was equally apprehensive of Indian hypernationalism. In particular, Rau, I offer, located concerns of development and good governance at the heart of independent India's constitution by relegating politics to the margins. Though Rau's ideals were rejected by the hyper-nationalist Indian leadership, his work when reconstructed actually emerges as a powerful index of alternative possibilities that India could have chosen at the moment of its political inception in 1947. Thus Rau's contributions enable us to consider the 'road not taken', providing a point of view from which to evaluate India's transition from the colonial to the postcolonial period.

In focusing on Rau's ideas on the postcolonial constitution, this essay seeks to depart from some of the conventional ways in which the history of the Indian constitution has been explored and instead join recent scholarly efforts already underway to forge a new path in explaining the making of the Indian constitution. The conventional explanation, perhaps best represented by Granville Austin's towering work, *The Indian Constitution: The Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966), suggests that members of the Constituent Assembly, despite ideological differences were able to cohere on certain fundamental principles to govern postcolonial India. These differences were ironed out primarily due to the Congress leadership and a willingness amongst the political classes to arrive at a consensus in the interest of the new nation-state. Such a view, however, glosses over what was arguably a long and a conflicted history of the making of the Indian constitution (Elangovan 2014). In particular, scholars such as Mithi Mukherjee, Uday Mehta, Pratap Mehta, Aditya Nigam and Rohit De, among others have expanded the focus of constitution-making beyond the Constituent Assembly to actors and processes that were not directly a part of the proceedings of the assembly (ibid.). Such a view, this essay maintains, holds the potential to explain the making and indeed the functioning of the constitution as well rather than simply focusing on the principle of consensus.

In this spirit of thinking afresh on the making of the Indian constitution, the life and career of B. N. Rau offers a new perspective on the making of the Indian constitution. Indeed, a brief review of Rau's career points to the number of significant positions that he held and help understand why his role becomes critical at the time of the making of the constitution. B. N. Rau was born at Karkal in South Kanara on 26 February 1887. After completing his education in Madras and Cambridge, he cleared his civil services examination in 1909 and joined the services in 1910. His career in the civil services was enviable. During his early years as a civil servant, Rau was posted as assistant magistrate and collector in various districts of Assam and Bengal. In 1920, the chief commissioner of Assam requested his services. Thereafter in 1925, Rau was appointed as the Legal Remembrancer and Secretary to the Government of Assam in the legislative department and Secretary to the legislative council. Rau's reputation as a legislative and constitutional expert grew during this stint. It was during this time that Rau was called to officiate in the Reforms Office of the Governor General as an Officer on Special Duty to supervise the task of the implementation of the 1935 Act. Rau served in this capacity for three years, after which he was knighted in 1938 and appointed as Judge in the High Court of Calcutta.[2] Rau continued as a judge until 1944. In 1944, after his retirement from the civil service, Rau was persuaded to accept the post of prime minister in Jammu and Kashmir, a princely state, which was under tremendous turmoil due to the intransigence of Maharaja Hari Singh. Rau, however, unused to political positions, resigned a few months later; it was at this time that he chose to accept the invitation of the Viceroy in 1945 to rejoin the Reforms Office to help smooth the transfer of power. Subsequently, in 1946, Rau became an adviser to the newly established constituent assembly, aiding the process of framing the Indian Constitution. In 1948, Rau chose to move to the UN, becoming India's permanent representative. Subsequently, he became a member of the International Law Commission, and ultimately passed away in Zurich, Switzerland on 30 November 1953, when he was serving his tenure as a judge in the International Court at The Hague.[3]

At the peak of his career, Rau was thus placed at the most significant moment in Indian political history, namely the transition of power and the making of the Indian constitution. In advising the Constituent Assembly, Rau sought to combine his vast administrative experience of colonial India and his phenomenal juristic knowledge from other countries in the world. Even prior to his appointment as the constitutional advisor, Rau had written several notes and drafts on a future constitution for India. As the constitutional advisor, Rau, in addition to drafting also attended several subcommittee meetings that met separately and which deliberated on different aspects of the constitution. Most significantly, perhaps, Rau was a member of the drafting committee of the constitution and in the process worked very closely with Ambedkar on deciding the finer aspects of the constitution before the draft was placed before the assembly in 1948.

Rau's notes, drafts, memoranda and correspondence with different leaders in the Constituent Assembly thus become an invaluable resource to explore Rau's ideas about the future Indian constitution. Though available only in scattered form, when reconstructed, Rau's ideals cohere around the pivotal idea of separating the realms of politics from the architecture of the constitution. Central to this project of restraining politics was an emphasis on Directive Principles of State Policy that would enable the Indian state to pursue the common good of development and a corresponding under-emphasis on the idea of judicially enforceable rights. However, as will be seen shortly, for Rau, such a constitution was not a recipe for an authoritarian state. On the contrary, in Rau's view, the constitution needed to establish a state that was to be guided by institutions that were to remain above partisan political interests. These institutions had to be headed by the office of the President, executed by a responsible legislature that needed to function with and yet *above* political interests, and finally the Directive Principles of State Policy had to guide the severely competitive field of politics. From such a perspective, then, justiciable fundamental rights had to assume a subordinate and not an equal position within the overall framework of the constitution.

Rau's ideas of constitution came at a critical moment when India was transitioning from a colonial to a postcolonial society. At this time of transition, the framers of India's constitution had several choices and eventually chose a path that was quite unlike what Rau had envisioned. Thus, the Indian constitution that was adopted in 1950 enshrined fundamental rights in the constitution with several restrictions on its exercise; it made the powers of the President only notional; it also centralised powers at the centre with ultimate control over the provinces remaining in the national capital, all of which led to the creation of a very powerful postcolonial state, one that was capable of not only keeping the country united but also saw internal differences as a threat to the integrity of the nation-state rather than working towards accommodating such differences in a constitutional structure. The impact of the making of such a constitution then reverberated throughout the remaining half of the twentieth century and continues to have its effects in the twenty-first century, with the rise and proliferation of several regional, diverse political interests, which constantly challenges this idea of India, enshrined in the Indian constitution. Rau's ideas, in this context then provide us an opportunity to remember a historic moment when a choice was available but passed over.

In what follows, I develop Rau's argument of the retreat of politics from the structure of the constitution by elaborating on three aspects of Rau's idea on the constitution: his overview of the constitution with a special emphasis on the role of the President and the legislature; his argument for directive principles; and finally, his argument against enshrining fundamental rights in the constitution. I conclude the essay by taking into account the fate of fundamental rights and directive principles in the postcolonial period and suggest that Rau's vision of privileging directive principles ultimately materialised but albeit in a way that Rau did not envisage.

## RAU'S OUTLINES OF A CONSTITUTION

Rau prepared a memorandum on the Indian constitution and later a draft constitution for the consideration of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly in 1947. In these drafts, certain distinctive characteristics of Rau's ideas can be discerned, of which, I will highlight the following: the preamble, the role of the President and the legislature and enshrining India's commitment to international relations.

### The Preamble

Rau's preamble interestingly began by qualifying the timeless invocation of 'we the people'. Rau instead proposed that the preamble should read as, 'We, the people of India, seeking to promote the common good, do hereby, through our chosen representatives, enact, adopt and give to ourselves this constitution' (Rao 1967, 3: 4). At least two parts of this preamble bear significance. First, Rau specified an objective for the constitution, which was to promote the 'common good'. In much of his earlier negotiations with Jinnah for instance, Rau had emphasised the goal of economic development as paramount, and which needed to exceed the political compulsions of its time and in foregrounding 'common good' in the preamble, Rau provided an unquestionable direction for the constitution. A second, equally significant part of the preamble lies in Rau identifying the people framing the constitution as 'our chosen representatives', a qualification that contextualised the temporal (for they were temporary representatives) and political nature of the process of constitution making. By consciously abjuring the timelessness of invoking the idea of 'we the people', Rau was perhaps most aware of the historical and political context in which the constitution was being drafted, and against which, he visualised his own ideal constitution.

## The Union Executive—The President, More than a Mere Figurehead

In his draft constitution, Rau vested in the President to act as a check on legislative authority by making the position far more powerful than what has since materialised in practice. There were at least two features of the position of the President that deserve careful attention. First, Rau intended for the President to have wide-ranging discretionary powers. Rau suggested that although the President could not overrule the popularly elected ministry in the legislature, yet the President should be 'entitled to exercise his own discretion' (Rau 1960: 70). Among these discretionary powers, Rau put forward the idea that, 'In India, such matters as the appointment of judges, the protection of minorities and the suppression of widespread disorder may properly be added to the list' (ibid.). In addition, Rau provided for certain special responsibilities and power to the office of the President for special conditions such as the prevention of riots in the country, protecting the financial stability, and safeguarding the interests of the minorities. Rau wanted to statutorily guarantee that the President could act in these matters through the exercise of his discretionary powers (ibid.: 71). Interestingly, since Rau wanted an active President, in his draft, he limited the term of the President to one reelection only.

In Rau's draft, the importance given to the position of the President is highlighted not only by the discretionary powers but also by the way in which his powers would be exercised in his absence. Rau stipulated that if the President is unable to perform his functions, then his authority was to be exercised by a Commission consisting of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Chairman of the Upper house or the Senate, and the Speaker of the Lower house or the house of representatives (ibid.: 68). This provision is of course strikingly different from what was eventually discussed and adopted in the assembly, whereby the Vice President in case of the President's absence discharged the latter's responsibilities. Rau's reasoning for such a provision was that the Vice President, having been elected by both the lower and the upper house of the legislature ends up serving only the upper house as its Chairman. In other words, once elected, the Vice President has no responsibility to the lower house of the legislature, which for Rau seemed 'inappropriate'. Further, he pointed out that in a parliamentary democracy, there was 'hardly any room for a Vice-President between the President and the Prime Minister' (ibid.: 69). Therefore, Rau argued that in the absence of the President, a commission should carry on his functions.

Another reason why Rau suggested a commission as opposed to a Vice President was the issue of balance of power. It is important to note that the commission consisting of the Chief Justice, the Chairman and Speaker of the Upper and Lower houses of legislature, in itself balances the important branches of power between legislature and the judiciary. Given the discretionary powers exercised by the President, especially in cases of communal riots or on a question of financial stability, questions which required a position of authority to act independently of political control, the commission would perhaps best be suited for such a purpose. In addition to protecting the office of the President, Rau also envisioned a Council, which would aid and advise the President on matters of national importance or any unforeseen contingency. The membership of this proposed council is worthy of attention. It was to consist of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, the Speaker and the Chairman of the two houses respectively, the Advocate General, all ex-Presidents, all ex-Prime Ministers, all ex-Chief Justices and such other nominated individuals as the President would deem fit. Such a council, Rau suggested would be a 'non-party Council of elder statesmen'. Further, he added, 'Such a Council may be found useful in India in such matters as the protection of minorities, the supervision, direction and control of elections and the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts' (ibid.).

In specifying such a Council to aid and advise President, independent of the office of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, Rau envisioned a President who could function at his own discretion at appropriate times. Further, this Council was constituted in such a way that it could function in the case of either a political breakdown or if the solution required a non-partisan approach. Thus, the President was not to remain as a titular head. On the contrary, he had an active role to play in the polity as someone guaranteeing the health of the nation and by remaining above political influences would be in a position to influence the legislature in a productive way.

## International Relations as part of the National Constitution

In a rare move, Rau made India's commitment to international peace a constitutional feature and did not relegate it to a matter of policy. Consisting of five clauses, Rau laid out the ways in which the Indian Union could benefit from its association with the UN. In particular, in clause 2, he said,

> For the purpose of the exercise of any executive function of the Union in or in connection with its defence or its external affairs, the Government may, subject to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, avail itself of or adopt any organ, instrument or method of procedure used or adopted for the like purpose by any other State or by the members of any group or organisation of nations with which the Union is or becomes associated for the purpose of international co-operation in matters of common concern. (Ibid.: 90)

In other words, by making the international context relevant for the affairs of the Union, Rau hinted at the fact that from the moment of postcoloniality, India would be responsible for its actions not only internally but also externally. In constitutionally mandating such a provision, Rau thus attempted to build a consensus around this idea of international relevance. This provision also served another purpose, which is revealed in clause 5, where he provided for the protection of the Princely States. He wrote,

> The Union shall honour all legitimate obligations arising out of any treaties or agreements which immediately before the commencement of this constitution were in force between His Majesty or the Government of India or any other competent authority and the head or the government of any other State, provided that such other State honours any reciprocal obligations towards the Union. (Ibid.: 138–39)

By making India's internal commitments, a component of international obligation, Rau hoped to minimise the risk of domestic violations of past treaties as a consequence of politics that could potentially occur in an atmosphere of hypernationalism.

Among other features, Rau's idea of a constitution distributed political power evenly between different branches of the government in order to ensure the pursuit of 'common goods' and more importantly towards development. More significantly, Rau, having recognised the potential of the legislature that embodied the 'popular will' to exercise indiscriminate power sought to limit such excesses by calling for an active President aided and advised by a council that included wide ranging representatives from different branches of the government and from the society to act as a check against an unbridled legislature.

However, I suggest that this did not mean that Rau had a naïve outlook either about politics or the role of the legislature. Indeed, between the legislature and the judiciary, Rau placed greater emphasis on the former rather than the latter. But, the reason for privileging legislature did not lie in celebrating an abstract principle of democracy or the efficacy of popular representation. Rather, for Rau, the legislature was the engine through which programmes of development could be effectively carried out by the process of legislation. Politics then for Rau had to pivot around debating the different conceptions of development but had to retreat from defining and influencing the institutions that were designed to implement these legislations. In other words, the field of politics was to be contained within the sphere of debating about development that needed to be separate from institutions that would implement measures for development. Rau sought to institutionalise the containment of this politics by incorporating the directive principles as an integral part and not as an 'optional extra' of the constitution.

## DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES

Instead of fundamental rights, Rau suggested the inclusion of Directive Principles of State Policy, a set of directives that were to guide the state in pursuing its welfare objectives. Along with fundamental rights, the directive principles have generated a lot of interest among constitutional scholars about the reasons for its inclusion.[4] For Rau, these directive principles were to be treated as rights, although they were non-justiciable. In his memorandum on the subject, Rau suggested that both directive principles and fundamental rights be considered as two kinds of rights with different jurisdictional consequences to their enshrinement. Such a classification, he pointed out, existed in other constitutional works such as in the Irish constitution and in the work of Dr Lauterpacht (Rao 1967, 2: 33).

Having laid out the arguments of considering these directive principles as rights, Rau then outlined seven principles. These broadly related to the following subjects—promotion of international peace and security, ensuring the elimination of communal discord, secure fair conditions of education, work and, ensuring 'the right to rest and leisure', promoting the welfare of the weaker sections of the population, protecting the culture, language and script of the different communities, raising the level of nutrition and ensuring a healthy work force with a particular emphasis on avoiding child labour (ibid.: 34). In making these rights non-justiciable, Rau did not intend to make these issues of secondary relevance to fundamental rights. Instead, by keeping these rights outside the purview of the courts, Rau actually elevated these rights above the fundamental rights or in another sense, made them much more elemental than fundamental rights. In other words, Rau intended these rights to be enforced by a social and a political will, an idea that may or may not have withstood judicial appeal.[5]

It is striking to note that Rau was actually involved at various points of time in his career, with all the directive principles that he lists. Rau's experience with initiating a Central Health Research Institute (1937–42), his efforts at drafting constitutional solutions to avoid the partition between India and Pakistan (1945–47), his reports on fair conditions of labour including nutrition and general health of the workforce (1940), his report on improving education (1946), his memorandum on allowing temple entry for dalits (1928), and his work with the tribal communities of Assam (1910–35) clearly demonstrate that Rau did not emptily speculate on these principles.[6] His personal experience with these matters, which actually encompassed a host of social, economic and political problems of late colonial India informed this enumeration on directive principles. Furthermore, the subjects he lists were precisely the subjects around which much of political mobilisation would take place immediately after independence. Indeed, in many parts of the country, most of these subjects were already areas around which political interests had already mobilised. Thus, the growth of the left labour movement, the Ambedkar-led movement of the scheduled castes, the simmering issues of communal discord among others were all elements which already defined or were instrumental in constituting the politics of late colonial and early postcolonial India. Rau's emphasis on directive principles thus was not an empty declaration of moral intent but rather foreseeing the possibility that these issues would become the crux of political contestation in decades to come. In this sense, for Rau, the directive principles became the conduit through which political interests could be expressed, manifested and implemented through the legislature. In other words, in Rau's ideal constitution, politics would enable the concretisation of various goals of development that could be fruitfully legislated upon and implemented through institutions without the fear of unbridled political interference.

Following the components of Rau's ideal constitution, which among others, aimed for the realisation of 'common good' and development, a goal aided by the political yet circumscribed institution of legislature and guided by the underlying commitments of directive principles, there remained the issue of fundamental rights, which appears as a problem for Rau's constitution, rather than as an ally. The reason, I suggest, is not because Rau did not believe in the idea of rights. In fact, Rau spent considerable time enumerating the principles of group rights to be a part of the constitution and also dwelt at length on the idea of human rights at the UN. Rather, fundamental rights becomes a problem for Rau's constitution because of two reasons—first, for Rau, rights could be a part of the common law of the land rather than a component of enforceable rights guaranteed in the constitution, and second, the inconsistent interpretation of the judiciary about the scope and extent of these fundamental rights would hinder the state from pursuing policies of social amelioration and projects of development. (In what follows, I elaborate on the second reason. In a speech on Human Rights in the UN, Rau laid out how different aspects of common law enacted by the British colonial administration incorporated elements of 'human rights'.)[7]

## THE PROBLEMATIC OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

In a lengthy note prepared in September 1946, Rau explained the reasons he was sceptical about enshrining fundamental rights in the constitution (Rao 1967, 2: 21). Rau pointed out that though the idea of fundamental rights was present in most constitutions of the world, yet there was always a problem in its implementation. In other words, a mere mention of these rights in the constitution would not serve the objective of the rights. Instead, in order to understand these rights, it would be important to examine the ways in which the courts, which were meant to be custodians of law, interpreted these rights.

For a lengthy analysis of the possibilities of the inconsistent interpretation by the courts, Rau chose to examine the provision of equality before the law in the US Constitution. Indeed, such a choice may not have been accidental as, both, in terms of communal parity as well as caste, social inequalities had dominated Indian public debates for several decades prior to the moment of constitution-making. Rau observed that though the 14th amendment of the US Constitution stated, 'no state shall "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws"', yet in practice the courts found it difficult to rule always in favour of equality. Rau argued that in the case of *Radice v. New York*, in 1924, the Supreme Court held that a New York law, which 'prohibited the employment of certain classes of women in restaurants of certain classes of cities between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.' was valid as long as 'the classification is not arbitrary, oppressive, or capricious' (ibid.: 23). However, the Court was not consistent in determining this classification of arbitrariness. Rau pointed out that in a case of anti-trust law, the Court ruled very differently in a similar case. In 1902, in the *Connolly v. Union Sewer Pipe Company* of 1902, the Court observed that a statute, which determined that agriculturists and livestock producers or raisers were exempt from the formation of trusts as opposed to other industrial trades were a manifest violation of equal protection of laws. But then again in 1940, in *Tigner v. Texas*, Rau noted that the Court reversed its previous decision by saying,

> The Constitution does not require things which are different in fact or opinion to be treated in law as though they were the same. And so we conclude that to write into law the differences between agriculture and other economic pursuits was within the power of the Texas legislature. Connolly's case has been worn away by the erosion of time and we are of opinion that it is no longer controlling. (Ibid.: 24)

While these cases broadly related to labour and industry, Rau also discussed at length a case that involved race, again possibly chosen for discussion due to the caste debates in India. In this case, one Mr Lloyd Gaines who was a black individual was refused admission at the University of Missouri's Law School because of his colour. The specific ground for such refusal was the fact that in the age of segregation it was not possible for University of Missouri to grant admission to Gaines. Moreover, the University contended that there was a separate law school for black persons in the neighbouring states of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois, where Gaines could fruitfully be employed. The Supreme Court of Missouri, having heard the petition and the response of the University decided in favour of the University by pointing out that the State of Missouri was willing to compensate by paying tuition for Gaines, if he chose to go to a neighbouring state. In the light of this decision by the Missouri Court, Gaines approached the Supreme Court, citing discrimination and violation of the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.

According to Rau, the Supreme Court in upholding the 'dignity of man', made several observations, which agreed with Gaines's contention that he was discriminated against. For instance, the Court held that

> the admissibility of laws separating the races in the enjoyment of privileges afforded by the State rests wholly upon the equality of privileges which the laws give to the separated groups within the State . . . By the operation of the laws of Missouri a privilege has been created for white law students which is denied to negroes by reason of their race. The white resident is afforded legal education within the State, the negro resident having the same qualifications is refused it there and must go outside the State to obtain it. (Ibid.: 26)

Based on these observations, the Court decided in favour of Gaines and overturned the judgment of the Supreme Court of Missouri. Drawing on this example, Rau pointed out that the importance of this judgment lay in the fact that even though there was no express provision made for equality of education in the constitution, the courts had interpreted the constitution in an innovative manner. However, this may not always be the case. Rau concluded his discussion of examples by noting that the enumeration of rights in general terms will leave both the legislature as well as the law courts in the dark. In other words, it might lead to a situation wherein the legislature may make laws that were unconstitutional, leading to an increase in the number of cases of litigation. Moreover, Rau feared that if an irremovable judiciary like in the US manned the courts, then there was always a danger of the entire process of legislation being vetoed by an insensitive judiciary or at the instance of a litigant (ibid.: 31).

After a substantial discussion of the case of the US, Rau pointed out the example of the constitutions of Switzerland, Ireland and Australia that incorporated provisions of fundamental freedoms without the danger of the courts overruling them. Citing Adams and Cunningham's analysis of the Swiss Confederation, Rau laid out that the Federal Tribunal in Switzerland could not inquire into the 'constitutional character of a law or a resolution of a general nature which has been adopted by the Federal Assembly' (ibid.). In the Irish Constitution of 1937, Rau noted, the plan of distinguishing 'fundamental rights' from 'directive principles of social policy', a plan that he would adopt in the constitution as well. In the Australian case, Rau said that though certain fundamental rights were declared, the system of courts were distinct in that there were separate ordinary courts, administrative courts, and a Constitutional court. So, the ordinary and administrative courts could not enquire into the constitutionality of a law. Such powers were vested only with the Constitutional court. (Interestingly, this Constitutional court consisted of a President, Vice-President and other members who were elected by the two houses of the legislature.) (ibid.: 32).

Fundamental rights, for Rau then, appears as an obstacle to the interests of governance and development, goals that were integral to the ideal constitution that Rau imagined. Taken separately, the argument against enshrining justifiable fundamental rights indeed appears jarring to both the moment of constitution-making as well as in postcolonial India. However, considered along with other aspects of Rau's ideal constitution such as the enshrinement of directive principles that would be independent of judicial interference, the separation of politics from the institutions of governance, a legislature that was political and empowered, and yet restrained, and finally, capped by the powers of the office of the President to act independently of political imperative in cases of internal emergencies conveys a far more balanced picture of the constitution. Importantly, Rau's constitution forces us to reflect on the costs of privileging either politics or fundamental rights at the cost of pursuing projects of development or the common good. Ultimately, what should a constitution aim for?

## CONCLUSION

Rau saw the moment of constitution-making as one filled with exciting possibilities of addressing the question of development and aim towards solving some of the fundamental socio-economic problems of the day. In this process, he urged that the only way out was embracing procedural equality, which accorded equal voices to all the provinces, provided group rights for minorities and vulnerable populations such as children, women and tribal populations. Once these aspects were fulfilled, as he saw it, the function of the constitution was to enable the amelioration of the poor and secure the basic socio-economic infrastructure in order to further this end. In the process, Rau rejected an idea of politics potentially overwhelming the making of the constitution and later on influencing the structure of the constitution. Hence, his carefully thought-out drafts of the constitution had an active President, who could act independent of the cabinet if the occasion arose, an active legislature whose politics would be guided by the directive principles, a judiciary that would be limited and responsible to the legislature and the whole structure of the constitution being guided by the larger impetus of international co-operation.

Finally, it would be useful to briefly review the afterlife of the Indian constitution with respect to the issue of fundamental rights versus directive principles in order to reflect on Rau's constitutional ideal. As of summer of 2013, the Indian constitution has been amended 98 times. Interestingly, the first amendment was passed in 1951, even before the first elections could be concluded and before the government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru took office in 1952. It is striking to note that of these 98 amendments, 22 amendments directly related to the question of the relationship between fundamental rights and directive principles. Consistently, through these amendments the state's right to curtail individual liberties in favour of welfare legislations was reinforced. Further, it is also necessary to contextualise the importance of these 22 amendments (since they account for slightly less than a fourth of the total number of amendments). Of the remaining 75 amendments, 17 amendments relate to territorial redistribution at different points of time and to delimitation of territories in the light of increased population; six are procedural, giving effect to the policy of reservation for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. The remaining amendments give further effect to the extension of reservations for certain classes in the north-eastern territories of the country and enable the inclusion of several provincial languages among the list of national languages in India. Most significantly, unlike the US, there is not a single amendment that guarantees rights to the individuals. If anything, the larger picture that emerges is one where the state has retained its right to limit individual rights in the interest of redistributing wealth (especially land) for the purposes of creating social equity.[8] In doing so, the Parliament over the years has relied on the themes contained in the directive principles, an idea that was close to Rau's concerns for a postcolonial India.

As suggested by Kalyani Ramnath (2012), there is a remarkable similarity between Rau's vision and the way these constitutional amendments were carried out in the name of the directive principles. It may be recalled that for Rau, the directive principles were meant to have a greater constitutional sanction than individual rights, the main reason being that in his view, the directive principles contained the blueprint for growth and development, which included a predominant element of fairness to all forms of labour and a commitment towards equity. Rau then hoped that these directive principles would be the areas around which politics could emerge and legislations would be enacted in the Parliament in order to work towards good governance and development. Rau was uncomfortable with the idea of enshrining fundamental rights precisely because he felt that the judiciary through its decisions could come in the way of socially progressive legislation. Interestingly, this is exactly what happened in the postcolonial period, as the language of the first amendment makes clear. The preface to the amendment reads, 'During the last fifteen months of the working of the Constitution, certain difficulties have been brought to light by judicial decisions and pronouncements specially in regard to the chapter on fundamental rights' (ibid.).[9]

However, there was an important difference as well between what Rau desired and the nature of the constitutional amendments of the postcolonial period. Rau's attention to directive principles was also accompanied by another important consideration, namely to restrain politics and the sphere of political influences at the margins rather than the centre of governance. Rau perceived that undue political interference in the realm of legislation could seriously hamper both amelioration and social justice. In order to avoid this possibility, Rau hoped that political parties converging on the idea of directive principles could then debate the best possible legislation in the legislature and make the required social changes. As it turned out, however, the moment of constitution-making itself was infused with a political anxiety of protection, which was particularly reflected in the chapters on fundamental rights and directive principles. After 1950, the directive principles began to be used for realising social and economic goals, which would ultimately yield favourable political results for the ruling party, the Indian National Congress. The most telling example of this would be Indira Gandhi's imposition of Emergency between 26 June 1975 and 21 March 1977, a Presidential proclamation that suspended all civil and political rights in the country. During this period, Indira Gandhi justified her legislative and executive acts in the name of the tenets that were already enumerated in the directive principles. This was an outcome that Rau would have never agreed with or foreseen.

For Rau, though he placed an emphasis on the directive principles, the constitution had to function within an overarching structure of parliamentary accountability to the authority of the President, who was ultimately to remain above politics. In such a scenario, the faith placed in the directive principles could never alter the overall structure of accountability and checks and balances that Rau's constitution had envisaged. But, in the constitution that was eventually framed by the Constituent Assembly, trust was placed in politics, rather than principles of governance and development to deliver the social and economic goods.[10] In this sense, any nostalgic flashback to the moment of drafting the constitution for the purpose of recovering ideals of liberalism needs to be tempered by taking into account the historical circumstances under which the constitution was framed and also considering ideas such as Rau's that were passed over. Such a perspective then yields fruitful results when we explore the multiple aspects of questions that become visible when we open the doors that have separated the colonial and the postcolonial periods.

## NOTES

1. In his eulogy in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament), Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, remembered B. N. Rau as the 'perfect civil servant' and as an 'eminent son of India'. B. N. Rau Papers, File No. 20, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

2. Rau's primary appointment was always that of District and Sessions Judge. Just prior to his call from the Reforms Office, Rau was already appointed as Judge of the High Court of Calcutta, where his term extended from April to September 1935.

3. A comprehensive biography of B. N. Rau does not exist. However, for some brief biographical information, see Venkataramiah (1987); Shiva Rao's introduction to a collected edition of the works of B. N. Rau found in Rau (1960); for an informal history of the Benegal family, see Bannerjee (2010). Also for official information see Government of Bengal (1939: 725–26).

4. For a most recent articulation on directive principles, see Ramnath (2012: 57–70).

5. Rau's argument here is akin to a recent argument made by Pratap Mehta (2010) on Ambedkar's idea of constitutional morality.

6. For details about Rau's early career, see Elangovan (2012).

7. See B. N. Rau's speech in the UN on the issue of Human Rights in UN (1949: 150–60).

8. The complete text and reasons for the amendment can be found in the following official Government of India website: http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/coifiles/amendment.htm (accessed on 20 March 2015).

9. See http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/coifiles/amendment.htm (accessed on 20 March 2015). It is pertinent here to note Gopalaswamy Ayyangar's urgent note to Nehru on the question of the first amendment. Ayyangar wrote,

> 'Firstly, the Congress Party and the Government were committed to enacting certain legislation relating to rent, land revenue and zamindari abolition as part of a plan of economic and social amelioration, and it is for the purpose of carrying out this commitment that the Constituent Assembly enacted clauses (4) and (6) of Article 31 of the constitution. As a matter of fact, a number of laws have been certified by the President under Article 31(6), and there are other laws which fall under Article 31(4) which have since been assented to; there are some more which have yet to come up to the President for assent. On placing enactments of this sort above the reach of the course of law there cannot be any difference of opinion. The Constituent Assembly itself had decided that such legislation should not be called into question in any court. The fact, however,

remains that such legislation has actually been questioned and its validity doubted and judgments have been actually rendered holding such legislation *ultra vires* by reference to Article 14, etc. the surmounting of this difficulty is, therefore, a matter of extreme urgency and importance' (Gopalaswamy Ayyangar Papers, Subject File No. 7, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi).

10. For a different perspective on the point about politics determining the moment of constitution making see, Mehta (2007).

CHAPTER 5

# Democracy's Biggest Gamble

## India's First Free Elections in 1952

Ramachandra Guha

India's first general elections represent a massive act of faith with few parallels in the history of humankind. A huge, newly independent country chose to adopt universal adult franchise immediately, rather than—as was the case in the West—restricting the vote to men of property, with the workers and women enfranchised later, and only after a bitter struggle. It is hard to overstate the occasion's radical novelty. The condescending imperialist belief was that non-Europeans were somehow not suited to self-government, and that Asians in particular were prone to 'Oriental despotism' (a pejorative even Karl Marx employed). Adding to the risk was the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Indian electorate was illiterate and poor. And yet the experiment worked, and more important, was followed by 12 successive elections over five decades, a source of understandable pride. It is not surprising, then, that in December terrorists struck at the Parliament in New Delhi, India's symbolic counterpart to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

In August 1947, India became free of British rule, but as a dominion, with an English governor general sitting above an Indian prime minister. A Constituent Assembly, its members drawn from the different states, set to work on drafting a constitution. In January 1950, the new constitution went into effect, and the country became a republic. In March 1950, Sukumar Sen, a member of the Indian Civil Service then serving as chief secretary of West Bengal, was appointed chief election commissioner. The following month, Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act, which set the voting age at 21 and gave the right to vote to every Indian who had resided continuously in a constituency for 180 days or more. In proposing the act, India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had expressed the hope that national elections would be held as early as the spring of 1951, Nehru's sense of urgency was understandable—the chief complaint of the Indian nationalist against the British Raj had been its denial of democratic rights—but his timetable was viewed with some alarm by the man who had to make the elections happen.

It is a pity we know so little about Sukumar Sen, an unsung hero of Indian democracy. Sen left no memoir and, it appears, no papers. Born in 1899, he was educated at Presidency College and at London University, where he was awarded a gold medal in mathematics. He joined the Indian Civil Service in 1921 and served in various districts and as a judge before taking up his post in West Bengal in 1947.

It was perhaps the mathematician in Sen that made him ask the prime minister to wait. No Indian official had ever before been presented with such a stupendous task. Consider, first of all, the size of the electorate: 176 million Indians aged 21 or older, of whom about 85 per cent could not read or write. Each voter had to be identified and registered. The registration of voters was merely the first step. For how did one design party symbols, ballots and ballot boxes for a mostly unlettered electorate? Polling stations had to be built and properly spaced, and honest and efficient polling officers recruited. Moreover, elections for seats in the 26 state assemblies were to take place at the same time, which meant that Sen would have to work with the election commissioners of the various states, men who had also been drawn from the ranks of the Indian Civil Service.

The mechanics of the elections, which were finally scheduled for the first months of 1952, presented a 'problem of colossal proportions', noted an American observer (Park 1952). At stake were 4,500 seats—about 500 in Parliament, the rest for the state assemblies. Some 224,000 polling booths had to be constructed and equipped with about 2 million steel ballot boxes (for which 8,200 tons of steel would be required), and 16,500 clerks were needed to type up and collate the electoral rolls. (About 380,000 reams of paper were used to print the rolls.) Some 56,000 presiding officers would supervise the voting, aided by another 280,000 'lesser staff', and 224,000 police would be required to prevent violence and intimidation.

The electorate was spread out over an area of more than a million square miles, and in places the terrain made the exercise horrendously difficult. Bridges had to be specially constructed across rivers to reach remote hill villages; naval vessels would be required to carry the rolls to the voting booths on small islands in the Indian Ocean. A second problem was social rather than geographical: many women in northern India, where social practices were more conservative, were reluctant to register under their own names, wishing instead to identify themselves as A's mother or B's wife. Sukumar Sen was appalled by a practice he called a 'curious senseless relic of the past', and directed his officials to correct the rolls by inserting the names of the women. Nonetheless, some 2.8 million eligible women voters who refused to cooperate, or whose husbands would not permit them to do so, had to be struck off the rolls.

The nature of the electorate brought about some innovative practices. One was the use of large pictorial symbols by which the illiterate voters could identify their party of choice. Drawn from daily life, these symbols were easily cognisable: a pair of bullocks, a hut, an elephant, an earthen lamp, and so on. A second innovation was the use of multiple ballot boxes, one for each party. Each ballot box was marked with its party's symbol, so that a voter could simply drop the paper he or she was given on entering the voting booth into the appropriate box. To prevent individuals from voting more than once, voters' hands were marked with a special indelible ink, developed by Indian scientists, which would not fade for a week. (Nearly 3.9 million phials of this ink were used in the 1952 elections.)[1]

## A Dazzling Diversity

It is interesting to reflect on the international situation in the months leading up to India's first general elections. Elsewhere in Asia, the French were fighting the Viet Minh, and UN troops on the Korean Peninsula were thwarting a North Korean offensive. South Africa's government, under the control of the Afrikaner National Party, had disenfranchised the Cape Coloureds, the last non-white group in that country to have the vote. The US had just tested its first hydrogen bomb, the king of Jordan and the prime minister of Iran had both been assassinated in 1951, and closer to home, the prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, had been shot dead on 15 October.

As it happened, the polls in India were to coincide with general elections in the UK. That old champion of empire, Winston Churchill, was seeking to lead his Conservatives back to power. In the 1930s and 1940s, Churchill had opposed granting independence to India, so the liberating task had fallen to his Labourite successor, Clement Atlee, who as prime minister had signed the act authorising British withdrawal from the subcontinent. The British elections were basically a two-party show. In India, however, there was a dazzling diversity of parties and leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru's Indian National Congress, popularly known as the Congress Party, the chief legatee and beneficiary of the freedom movement, was in power. Opposing it were a variety of more-or-less new parties that had been formed by some greatly gifted individuals. There was the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (Peasants, Workers and Citizens Party), founded by J. B. Kripalani, a former president of the Congress Party and a key participant in and leader of several of Mahatma Gandhi's protest campaigns against the Raj. There was also the Socialist Party, whose leading lights included the charismatic Jayaprakash Narayan. Originally from Bihar, Narayan had been radicalised by his experiences as a student in America during the Great Depression. Later, he was to emerge as a hero of the 'Quit India' rebellion of 1942.

Both Kripalani and Narayan accused the Congress Party of having betrayed its commitment to the poor. They claimed to stand for the ideals of the old 'Gandhian' Congress, which had placed the interests of workers and peasants before those of landlords and capitalists (see, for example, Mehta 1952).

A different critique was offered by Jan Sangh (People's Union), which sought to consolidate India's largest religious grouping, the Hindus, into a solid voting bloc. The party's inaugural meeting, held in New Delhi on 21 September 1951, began with a recitation from the Vedas and the singing of patriotic hymns. On the rostrum sat the party's founder, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a brilliant lawyer from a famous political family of Bengal, along with other leaders. Behind them a white backdrop was hung with pictures of Shivaji and Rana Pratap—medieval Hindu chieftains who had battled their Muslim rulers—and a scene from the Mahabharata in which Lord Krishna persuades the remorse-stricken Arjuna to take up arms to fight the evil

Kauravas. Along with these portraits was painted, in the auspicious colour saffron, an earthen lamp, signifying sacred fire.[2]

The imagery, taken from the Hindu epics but also invoking those Hindu warriors who had later fought the Muslim invader, was striking. But who, one wonders, did the evil enemy, the Kauravas, represent? Was it Pakistan, the Muslims, Jawaharlal Nehru or the Congress Party? All figured as objects of hatred in the speeches of Jan Sangh's leaders. The party stood for the reunification of the motherland through the reabsorption (or perhaps conquest) of Pakistan, which had broken away from India in August 1947. It viewed Indian Muslims as a suspect minority, who had 'not yet learnt to own this land and its culture and treat them as their first love'. It accused the Congress Party of 'appeasing' these uncertainly patriotic Muslims (Baxter 1971: 87–88ff).

Mukherjee had once been in Jawaharlal Nehru's government, as had B. R Ambedkar, the great Untouchable lawyer who, as union law minister, had helped draft the Indian constitution. Ambedkar had resigned from office to revive the Scheduled Caste Federation, the party of the erstwhile Untouchables, in time for the elections. He sharply attacked the Congress government for doing little to lift up the lower castes: it was 'the same old tyranny, the same old oppression, the same old discrimination . . .' After freedom had been won, said Ambedkar, the Congress Party had degenerated into a *dharamsala* (rest home), without unity of purpose of principles, and 'open to all, fools and knaves, friends and foes, communalists and secularists, reformers and orthodox and capitalists and anti-capitalists'.[3]

Still further to the left was the Communist Party of India. In 1948, many activists of the CPI had gone underground to lead a peasant insurrection that they hoped would fructify as a countywide revolutionary upsurge on the Chinese model. But the police, and in some places the army, had cracked down hard. So the Communists came above ground in time to participate in the elections. A temporary amnesty was granted, and the militants put away their arms and went looking for votes. This abrupt change of roles produced dilemmas no text by Marx or Lenin could help resolve. Thus, a female candidate in Bengal was not sure whether to wear crumpled saris, so as to be seen as identifying with the poor, or to wash and iron them, in order to appeal to middle-class voters. A candidate who had recently been leading a peasant insurrection in Telangana (in what is now Andhra Pradesh), recalled his confusion at being offered a drink by a senior official: he gulped down the offering, only to be hit by a 'reeling sensation' as the fruit juice he had expected turned out to be whisky (Sen 2001: 220–21; Reddy 1973: 71–72).

Adding to the list were regional parties based on ethnicity and religion. All had one target: the ruling Congress Party and its leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. They faced angry protests by Hindu refugees from East and West Pakistan, and the grumblings of the Sikhs in the north and the Andhras in the south, both of whom wanted the centre to form provinces where they would be in a clear majority. Nor had independence ameliorated the festering problems of poverty and inequality within India, for which the ruling party was likely to be held responsible.

The newspaper headlines of the day make interesting reading, not least because the issues they flagged have remained at the forefront of Indian politics ever since. 'Ministers Face Stiff Opposition', read a headline from Uttar Pradesh. 'Caste Rivalries Weaken Bihar Congress', read another. From the northeast came this telling line: 'Autonomy Demand in Manipur'. From Gauhati came 'Congress Prospects in Assam: Importance of Muslim and Tribal Vote'. Gwalior offered 'Discontent Among Congressmen: List of Nominees Creates Wider Split'. A Calcutta headline ran: 'W. Bengal Congress Chief Booed at Meeting' (the hecklers being refugees from the east). 'No Hopes of Free and Fair Election', began a story with a Lucknow dateline, this being the verdict of J. B. Kripalani, the leader of Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, who claimed that state officials would rig the polls in favour of the ruling party. And the city of Bombay offered, at three different moments in the campaign, these superbly representative headlines: 'Congress Apathy Towards Scheduled Caste: Charges Reiterated by Dr Ambedkar'; 'Congress Banks on Muslim Support' and 'Fourteen Hurt in Election Clash'.

## NEHRU TAKES TO THE ROAD

Faced with opposition from without and with dissidence within his own party, Nehru took to the road. In nine weeks he travelled 25,000 miles, including 18,000 by air, 5,200 by car, 1,600 by train.[4] The Congress campaign, remarked one commentator, 'was a one-man affair—Nehru, Nehru and more Nehru. He was chief of staff, field commander, spokesman and foot-soldier at one and the same time' (Brecher 1959: 439). Nehru kicked off his campaign with a speech in the border town of Ludhiana, in the Punjab, the province that had seen the most horrific violence between Hindus and Muslims in the partition riots of 1947. Here he declared an 'all-out war against communalism', that is, against the use of religion by political parties and groupings. He condemned the communal bodies that in the name of Hindu and Sikh culture were 'spreading the virus of communalism as the Muslim League once did . . .' These 'sinister communal elements' would if they came to power 'bring ruin and death to the country'. He asked the half million Indians in his audience to 'keep the windows of our mind open and let in fresh breeze from all corners of the world'.

The sentiment was Gandhi-like, and indeed Nehru's next major speech was delivered in Old Delhi on the afternoon of 2 October, the Mahatma's birthday. He spoke in Hindustani of the government's determination to abolish both untouchability and landlordism. Once more, he identified communalists as the chief enemy, who 'will be shown no quarter', and 'overpowered with all our strength'. Nehru's 95-minute speech was punctuated with loud cheers, not least when he declared: 'If any person raises his hand to strike down another on the ground of religion, I shall fight him till the last breath of my life, both at the head of the government and from outside'.

In Bihar, Nehru deplored the 'monster of casteism' which had even sullied Gandhi's Congress. In Bombay, he reminded his audience that a vote for Congress was also a vote for a foreign policy of peace and principled neutralism. In Bharatpur and Bilaspur, he deplored the impatience of his left-wing critics, whose ends, if not their means, he approved. As he put it, 'We can build the edifice of Socialism brick by brick only'. In Ambala, he asked the women to cast off their purdahs and 'come forward to build the country'. In Kerala, and elsewhere, he expressed his admiration for the best among his adversaries, for Ambedkar, Kripalani and the Socialist, Jayaprakash Narayan, men who had once been his colleagues. 'We want a number of [such] men with ability and integrity', he said. 'They are welcome. But all of them are pulling in different directions and doing nothing in the end'. Wherever he went, he asked the children to join him in singing the national anthem. His message was patriotic rather than narrowly partisan: for when the crowd shouted *Pandit Nehru zindabad* (Long live

Pandit Nehru) or *Congress zindabad* (Long live Congress), he asked them to say instead *Jai Hind* (Hail India) or *Naya Hindusthan zindabad* (Glory to the new India).

In the course of his campaign, Nehru addressed 300 mass meetings and myriad wayside gatherings. He spoke to about 20 million people directly, while an equal number merely waved to him as his car whizzed past. Those who heard and saw him included miners, peasants, pastoralists, factory workers and agricultural labourers. Women of all classes turned out in numbers for his meetings. Sometimes there was a sprinkling of hostiles in the crowds. In parts of northern India, Jan Sangh supporters shouted that Nehru was not to be trusted since he ate beef (which he very possible did!). According to the Indian journalist, Frank Moraes, when Nehru came across a group of Communists waving the hammer-and-sickle, he said, 'Why don't you go and live in the country whose flag you are carrying?' To which they responded, 'Why don't you go to New York and live with the Wall Street imperialists?' (Moraes 1956: 413).

But, for the most part, the people who came to hear Nehru were sympathetic, and often adulatory (Anon. 1952: 23). When Nehru spoke in Bombay, a procession made up mainly of Muslims marched to Chowpatty Beach to the accompaniment of pipes and cymbals. A pair of bullocks and a plow (the Congress Party symbol) led the procession. According to contemporary press reports, everywhere crowds would begin to gather in the early morning for talks scheduled for the afternoon; people often broke through the barricades in their 'enthusiasm to catch a glimpse of Mr Nehru'. Nehru moved his listeners and he, in turn, was moved by them.

His own feelings are best captured in a letter he wrote to one who with both delicacy and truth can be referred to as his closest lady friend. 'Wherever I have been', he told Edwina Mountbatten, the wife of the last viceroy of India,

> vast multitudes gather at my meetings and I love to compare them, their faces, their dresses, their reactions to me and what I say. Scenes from past history of that very part of India rise up before me and my mind becomes a picture gallery of past events. But, more than the past, the present fills my mind and I try to probe into the minds and hearts of these multitudes. Having long been imprisoned in the Secretariat of Delhi, I rather enjoy these fresh contacts with the Indian

> people . . . The effort to explain in simple language our problems and our difficulties, and to reach the minds of these simple folk is both exhausting and exhilarating.[5]

## INDIA VOTES

One place Nehru did not get to was the *tahsil* (country) of Chini in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh. The locals went to the polls on 25 October 1951, more than two months before most Indians, before the winter snows sealed their valleys. Journalists had to rely on official sources for information about this remote locale and its inhabitants. The villagers of Chini, reported the *Hindustan Times*, owed allegiance to the Panchen Lama of Tibet and were ruled by rituals overseen by local priests. These included *gorasang*, a religious service to celebrate the completion of a new house; *kangur zalmo*, a ceremonial visit to the Buddhist library at Kanam; *menthako*, 'where men, women, and children climb hills, dance and sing'; and *jokhiya chug simig*, the interchange of visits between relatives. Now there was a new ritual, to be performed at five-year intervals: voting in a general election.

The rest of India went to the polls the following January and February. The highest turnout, 80.5 per cent, was recorded in the parliamentary constituency of Kottayam, in present-day Kerala; the lowest, 18 per cent, in Shahdol, in what is now Madhya Pradesh. Overall, about 60 per cent of registered voters exercised their franchise; this despite the high levels of illiteracy. A Bombay weekly marvelled at the high turnout in the tribal forest districts of Orissa, where Santhals and Mundas came to the polling places armed with bows and arrows.[6] The voting was especially brisk in Bombay. While Delhi was where the rulers lived, Bombay was India's cultural, financial and industrial capital. Since the Congress Party, the Socialists, the Communists and the Scheduled Caste Federation all had strong roots here, the campaigning had been frenetic. 'At 8 a.m. [on 3 January] when sirens blared to signalise the commencement of polling', reported the *Times of India* the next day, 'there was evidence everywhere of the previous night's hectic electioneering, and municipal sweepers were still busy cleaning the propaganda literature which littered the streets'.

Altogether, 900,000 residents of Bombay, or 70 percent of the city's electorate, exercised their democratic right. The workers came out in force. Thus, again according to the *Times of India*,

> in the industrial areas voters formed long queues long before the polling stations opened, despite the particularly cold and dewy morning. In contrast to this, at the W.I.A.A. Club in Malabar Hills, which housed two polling stations, it appeared as if people straggled in for a game of tennis or bridge and only incidentally to vote.

In the middle of January, a young Indian writer published an essay on the elections in the *New Statesman*. She offered an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the different parties in the fray but concluded that it 'was an unequal fight. The Congress has merely to remind the villager that it got rid of the British Raj'. Its record of struggle and sacrifice, and the great and wide appeal of its leader, would allow the voter to forgive the Indian National Congress its indifferent record in office. The writer viewed the future with wary optimism. 'With his magnetic personal charm', she remarked,

> Nehru will doubtless carry the day; but many will be voting in the hope that after the elections he will really throw out all the crooks, cranks, revivalists and moneyed merchants [within the Congress], who consider a national flag, a national language, jobs for nieces and nephews, important licenses and squandering crores on Prohibition more important than food, houses and clothing. (Malik 1952)

Polling ended in the last week of February. When the results were in, the Congress Party had secured 364 out of 489 seats in Parliament, and 2,247 out of 3,280 seats in the state assemblies. But, as critics were quick to point out, there was a serious discrepancy between the percentage of seats won and the percentage of votes polled. Congress had won 45 per cent of the vote but took 74 per cent of the seats in the parliamentary elections; the corresponding figures for the state elections were 42 per cent and 69 per cent. Nonetheless, as many as 28 Congress Party ministers had been defeated, including such figures of influence as the home minister of Bombay (and future prime minister) Morarji Desai. More striking still, it was a Communist, Ravi Narayan Reddy—he who drank his first glass of whisky during the campaign—who won a seat in Parliament by the largest margin, larger even than Jawaharlal Nehru's.

As the voting was about to get underway, Sukumar Sen spoke of the forthcoming election as 'the biggest *experiment* in democracy in human history' (quoted in Park 1952). C. R. Srinivasan, a veteran Madras editor, demurred, 'A very large majority [will] exercise votes for the first time: not many know what the vote is, why they should vote, and whom they should vote for; no wonder the whole adventure is rated as the biggest *gamble* in history'.[7] Sharing this scepticism was Penderel Moon, a brilliant scholar of Oxford's All Souls College and an ex-Indian Civil Service official who had chosen to stay on in India. In 1941, Moon had spoken to the graduating students of Punjab University about the unsuitability of Western-style democracy in the Indian social context. Now, 11 years later, he was the chief commissioner of the hill state of Manipur, which meant he had to depute election officers and supervise the voting. As the residents of Manipur went to the polls, Moon wrote to his father that 'a future and more enlightened age will view with astonishment the absurd farce of recording the votes of millions of illiterate people'.[8]

Even Nehru had periodic misgivings. In December 1951, he took a brief leave from campaigning to address a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) symposium in Delhi. The prime minister said he believed democracy was the best form of government, but he wondered whether

> the quality of men who are selected by these modern democratic methods of adult franchise gradually deteriorates because of lack of thinking and the noise of propaganda . . . He [the voter] reacts to sound and to the din, he reacts to repetition and he produces either a dictator or a dumb politician who is insensitive. Such a politician who is insensitive. Such a politician can stand all the din in the world and still remain standing on his two feet and, therefore, he gets selected in the end because the others have collapsed because of the din. (As quoted in Fisher and Bondurant 1956: 56–57)

These misgivings were doubtless based on his recent experiences on the road. A week later, Nehru suggested that it might be better to have direct elections for the lower levels of government—say within the village and district—and indirect elections for the higher levels. For, as he put it, 'direct election for such a vast number is a complicated problem and the candidates may never come into touch with the electorate and the whole thing becomes distant'.[9] (Nehru had an unusual capacity, among politicians at any rate, to view several sides of a question. He could see the imperfections of the process even while being committed to it.)

Other observers were more sanguine. The Ambala *Tribune* was 'struck with the sense of responsibility and political maturity which adult voters have displayed on the whole all over the country', adding that 'the common people . . . have, however, given a better account of themselves . . . than the educated elite'. The *Times of India* held that the polls had 'confounded all those sceptics who thought the introduction of adult franchise was too risky an experiment in this country'. The *Hindustan Times* claimed that 'there is universal agreement that the Indian people have conducted themselves admirably in the largest experiment in democratic elections in the history of the world . . . (as cited in ibid.: 61–62).' By the time the final results were in, and the Congress Party had emerged victorious, the doubts in Nehru's own mind had disappeared. 'My respect for the so-called illiterate voter', he said, 'has gone up. Whatever doubts I might have had about adult suffrage in India have been removed completely' (as quoted in Morris-Jones 1952).

The foreign press, on the whole, concurred. True, there were Americans who worried that since the Communists had emerged as the second largest party in Parliament, 'India would soon be lost to the Western world' (Schwartz 1952: 21). But most foreign observers were exultant rather than alarmist. A British couple, he a former member of the Indian Civil Service and she a reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, pointed to the very low level of violence: 'Indeed the entire tone of the elections, even on the Communist or Hindu Mahasabha platforms, was reminiscent of Hyde Park on a rainy day' (Zinkin and Zinkin 1952).

A visiting Turkish journalist focused on the content rather than its form. He admired Nehru's decision not to follow other Asian countries in taking 'the line of least resistance' by developing 'a dictatorship with centralisation of power and intolerance of dissent and criticism'. Yet the 'main credit', he wrote,

> goes to the nation itself. 176,000,000 Indians were left all alone with their conscience in face of the polling box. It was direct and

> secret voting. They had their choice between theocracy, chauvinism, communal separatism and isolationism on the one side; secularism, national unity, stability, moderation and friendly intercourse with the rest of the world on the other. They showed their maturity in choosing moderation and progress and disapproving of reaction and unrest.[10]

In one sense the Turkish journalist was right. There were indeed 176 million heroes; or, to be more precise, 107 million heroes, those among the eligible who actually took the trouble to vote. Still, some individuals were more heroic than others. Thus, as the respected Lucknow sociologist D. P. Mukerji pointed out, 'great credit [was] due to those who [were] in charge of this stupendous first experiment in Indian history. Bureaucracy . . . certainly proved its worth by honestly discharging the duties imposed on it by a honest Prime Minister'.[11] The juxtaposition was important, and also ironic. For there was a time when Nehru had little but scorn for the bureaucracy. 'Few things', he had written in his autobiography, 'are more striking to-day in India than the progressive deterioration, moral and intellectual, of the higher services, more especially the Indian Civil Services. This is most in evidence in the superior officials, but it runs like a thread throughout the services' (Nehru 1949a [1936]: 598).[12] This was written in 1935, when the Indian Civil Service men who were the objects of Nehru's derision had the power to put him and his fellow nationalists in jail. And yet, 15 years later, Nehru was obliged to place the polls in the hands of men he would once have dismissed as imperialist stooges.

In this respect, the 1952 elections followed a script jointly co-authored by forces long opposed to one another: British colonialism and Indian nationalism. Between them these forces had now given the new nation what can fairly be described as a jump start on democracy. Since 1952, there have been 12 more general elections, not to speak of countless state-level votes. None of these polls, it has to be admitted, have much resembled a Hyde Park meeting, and between 1975 and 1977 democracy was suspended when Indira Gandhi declared an 'emergency'. There has been violence, intimidation and fraud. But, on the whole, Indian elections have been more fair than foul. And—what is surely the central point—they continue to be held. The average turnout exceeds 60 per cent, a number comfortably in excess of the average in most Western democracies. Strikingly, the lower castes and classes tend to vote in greater percentage than the middle and upper classes, proof of the faith of the ordinary Indian in the processes of bourgeois democracy.

To be sure, Indian democracy is flawed and fragmented. It is shot through with corruption at all levels, among politicians and civil servants alike. But it is still alive. For this, many individuals and institutions can take credit. But any such accounting must begin with Jawaharlal Nehru and Sukumar Sen, and with the two institutions whose finer values they embodied, the Indian National Congress and the Indian Civil Service.

## Notes

1. This description of the mechanics of the election is based on Sen (1955), supplemented by Park (1952) and Tinker and Walker (1956).

2. News report in *The Searchlight* (Patna), 11 November 1951.

3. Reports in the *Hindustan Times* (Delhi), 12 October 1951; *Times of India* (Bombay), 9 November 1951; Mehta (1952: 61).

4. This and the following paragraphs on Nehru's all-India election tour are based on newspaper reports in the *Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times*, supplemented by Rajkumar (1952).

5. Nehru to Lady Mountbatten, 3 December 1951, quoted in Gopal (1979: 161).

6. 'General Elections', editorial, *Economic Weekly*, 5 January 1952.

7. 'The Elections Are On', *The Indian Review*, January 1952; emphasis added.

8. Letter in Mss. Eur. F. 230/26, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London.

9. *Tribune* (Ambala), 22 December 1951; *Hitavada*, 30 December 1951, both quoted in Fisher and Bondurant (1956: 56–58).

10. Ahmed Emin Yalman, editor, *Daily Vatan* (Istanbul), writing in the *Times of India*, 21 February 1951.

11. 'First Fruits of General Elections', *Economic Weekly*, 26 January 1952.

12. The quote is taken from the postscript dated 25 October 1935.

CHAPTER 6

# 'In the Name of the Politics'

## Sovereignty, Democracy and the Multitude in India

### Dipesh Chakrabarty

> The first of the great operations of discipline is [to] . . . transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities.
>
> —Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

'To take part in demonstrations and hooliganism in *the name of politics*' (emphasis added), said Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, speaking to a group of college students in the city of Patna in Bihar on 30 August 1955, 'is, apart from the right or wrong of it, not proper for students of any country'.[1] A 'minor' conflict between the students of the B. N. College, Patna, and state transport employees had led to police firing on students on 12 and 13 August 1955. Independence Day celebrations on 15 August were marred by 'desecration of the national flag, students-police clashes and black flag demonstration in Chhapra, Biharsharif, Daltonganj, and Nawada' (Nehru 2001b: 47 [editors' note]). Nehru had gone to Patna to assess the situation. In retrospect, it is possible to read Nehru's speech as addressing a question that would be important for postcolonial India: what kind of political behaviour would be appropriate for the citizens of an independent nation? Nehru's expression, 'in the name of politics', suggests that he did not see 'demonstrations and hooliganism' as the proper stuff of the politics that students could take part in.

Nehru deplored the police action: 'It is obvious that any incident that warrants firing is bound to be deplorable . . .' But he could not 'tolerate' the violence and the trampling of the national flag. Violence in public life was something he saw as a sign of political immaturity:

'I cannot tolerate this at all. Is India a nation of immature, childish people? . . . We must behave like an adult, mature, independent nation'. Students must have interrupted his talk at this point, for the speech reads: 'Shouting and creating chaos will get you nowhere. I represent a mature nation. How can I have any respect for your intelligence . . . if the students in this town do not have the patience to listen to me?' (ibid.: 72). In another speech made at a public meeting in Guwahati, Assam, a few days earlier, Nehru had already made this point:

> No strong nation indulges in throwing stones and behaving like hooligans. Any fool can do that . . . But why should an incident in Patna set off a conflagration all over Bihar, with trains being burnt and attacks on police and the railway officials and what not? The whole thing started with a small incident on a bus. Our students, particularly in Bihar, consider it beneath their dignity to buy tickets on buses or trains. What kind of a country are we building? (Ibid.: 57)

Nehru was not against students taking an interest in political matters. Such interest was part of the process that would make them into citizens:

> You have the right to belong to any political party that you choose. But one development which is wrong is the increasing interference of political parties in universities and colleges, generating great tension. . . . I do not say that you should not take part in politics. As citizens you must think about these things. But you must keep them out of universities and colleges'. (Ibid.: 74)

Violence could not be a part of democracy: 'We have democracy in India. . . . We cannot get anywhere by beating up one another or breaking the laws' (ibid.). Politics in democracy must be based on discussions, debates, and discipline. Nehru continued: '. . . The most crucial thing at this juncture is unity and discipline . . .' (ibid.) He added: '. . . the moment we allow ourselves to behave like hooligans, we will lose control over ourselves. . . . The reins [of public life] then pass into the hands of goondas, the lawless elements . . .' (ibid.: 78).

Yet, in spite of his aversion to the violence of student action, Nehru could not but see that what the students in Bihar had done was not totally unfamiliar to him. Their actions were reminiscent of the anti-British nationalist movement of the pre-independence period. He conceded that the violence and indiscipline he regarded as 'improper' to politics could be 'the lot of students only in countries under foreign rule'. It was somehow acceptable when students of a country under foreign rule resorted to them. But they were 'not the sign of a free nation'. He challenged his audience: 'You can find out if such things happen in Great Britain, America, Soviet Union, Germany, Japan, China or any other country' (ibid.: 83). Indeed, on other occasions too in the 1950s, Nehru insisted on there being a real difference between the political methods used to achieve independence and the political methods suitable for an independent democratic country. Mentioning the agitation by Sikh leaders for the creation of a separate Punjabi *suba* (province), Nehru once again pointed to the 'obsolete' nature of their political methods. Referring directly to the Gandhian technique of satyagraha—often translated, roughly, as passive resistance—Nehru said:

> I cannot say that nobody should ever do satyagraha. It is possible that it may be necessary sometimes. But to go on hunger strike or undertake satyagraha over day-to-day problems, whether it is a political problem or an industrial or labour dispute, is absolutely wrong. I want you to realise that it weakens us politically . . . This is worth considering because an independent nation which is advancing, and is no longer immature, has to adopt different methods of working. We must give up these ways . . . Whether it is, why don't we talk? . . . Are we going to start a civil war in the country? That is absurd. ('Policy of India', in ibid.: 22–23)

He went on to mention a strike in Kanpur:

> A strike has been going on in the factories of Kanpur for the last two months or so. It has excited a great deal of passion. I feel that the time is gone when we could solve our problems in this way in India or anywhere else. (Ibid.: 23–24).

Now, why was it that practices that were judged acceptable as political methods in colonial India—defying the law, staging satyagraha, even destroying public property, and so on—were no longer an appropriate language for politics in the postcolonial period, at least in Nehru's view? Why would Nehru now describe them as pure 'indiscipline', as signs of political 'immaturity'? I do not think the distinction Nehru drew between politics appropriate for fighting foreign rule and what was properly political for a democratic and sovereign India was merely self-serving. He had a point. Both the violent and non-violent methods of political agitation used during British rule were techniques of challenging the sovereignty of the British in India. Anti-colonial political methods were all designed to challenge the capacity of the colonial rulers to make and enforce law. Breaking the law was central to Gandhian nationalism. Now that India was a postcolonial, independent state based on the democratic principle of representation through universal adult franchise, actions that called into question that sovereignty of the new state were necessarily illegitimate in the eyes of Nehru. In his speech to the students in Patna, he castigated the Communist Party of India—whose student followers, he suspected were involved in insulting the national flag—for insisting 'that India was still a colonial country' (ibid.: 72). Politics, for Nehru, had become a question of negotiating the day-to-day problems of development: '. . . The problems facing the country are mainly economic and in a sense the biggest issue is the Five-Year-Plan . . .' ('Tasks Ahead', in ibid.: 6). Crowd action was no longer political in Nehru's reckoning; it was merely an act of hooliganism carried out 'in the name of the political'. As he put it to the students in Patna: 'Now how do you think we can solve India's problems except through discipline?'(ibid.: 74) Or as he put it in an earlier moment in the speech: 'We must try to solve our problems through discussion' (ibid.: 6).

The very transition from the colonial to the postcolonial state in India thus raised in turn an important question about Indian political life: What would constitute the limits of the political in independent, democratic India? How would politics in the country reflect in everyday life the idea of the popular sovereignty that underlay the parliamentary form of the government and that was enacted in the five-yearly ritual of universal adult franchise? How would politics become a mundane and quotidian part of development? In some ways, Nehru looked forward to a certain kind of diminution of the role of politics in national life: '. . . [I]n today's world, an engineer has more value than an officer sitting in the secretariat. Similarly, . . . scientists are more valuable than our ministers'.[2] 'I am fed up of (*sic*) politics', he said in a public speech in Chandigarh in 1955. It was as if politics should end with the attainment of independence. Whatever politics remained should be harnessed in the interest of development: 'My entire life has been spent in politics and even now I have to give most of my time to it. . . . Ultimately, however, the real problem in front of us is the economic progress of India' (Nehru 2001a: 33).

Nehru argued in the 1950s that any practice that in effect or by intention challenged the sovereignty of the new state fell outside the limits of the political. It became an unlawful activity deserving of punishment by the law (that is, by an act that asserted the sovereignty of the state). One could also read into Nehru's statements the idea that, on the attainment of independence, something like a sphere of 'everyday politics', where politics was part of the routine and process of development, should emerge in India: 'The behaviour of a free and independent nation is always different. It is not the way of constant friction and tension as in the days of British rule' (Nehru 2001b: 55).

Nehru was not alone in raising these questions. Well into the 1960s, commentators in India, writing in a Nehruvian vein on the problem of 'indiscipline' and violence in Indian public life, would point to the need to create an idiom of everyday politics in independent India that was different from the political language of the nationalist movement. In a collection of essays published in the 1960s on the issue of mass violence and its relationship to democracy in India, R. Srinivasan, a political scientist with the then university of Bombay would make this negative evaluation of the Gandhian tools of mass politics:

> It is time we recognised several of these undemocratic features have grown out of methods which we resorted to for attaining independence. Against the absolute right of *purna swaraj* [freedom; lit. complete self-government] there could be no counter claims acceptable to the people under subjection. The method followed was that of satyagraha, peaceful agitation, and constitutional agitation, but with one difference. The "constitutional" agitation simultaneously undermined the basis of constitutionalism. (Srinivasan 1967: 67–68)

In writing the foreword to the book in which Srinivasan's essay appeared, P. B. Gajendragadkar, the then vice-chancellor of the university, pointed to the 'danger' that mass violence posed to 'the democratic way of life' at a time when (in my terms) the sovereignty of the government was no longer colonial:

> Citizens who are disaffected against the government *established by law* have other remedies open them and resort to violence . . . by a group of people with the political object of ousting the government in power is totally inconsistent with the true concept of democracy. (Ibid.: 7; emphasis added)

He also made a reference to the seemingly unfortunate legacy of the anti-colonial movement in this regard:

> It is true that even while Gandhiji started his satyagraha movement, Mrs Besant protested strongly against the whole philosophy of Gandhiji on which Satyagraha was founded. Mrs Besant told Gandhiji "that the day of victory for India would be the biggest day of defeat for Gandhi because the spirit of lawlessness, resulting in loss of respect for law, which was inculcated through civil disobedience, would react against the Indian government and people would disobey authority on the lines taught to them by Gandhi." Some people take the view that the recent developments in India have proved Mrs Besant to be a true prophet. (Ibid.: 7–8)

But this new call for mass-behaviour that was properly political, as these quotations make clear, went against the history of what constituted the political in colonial India. We need to understand the colonial legacy of the political to see the ironical significance of Nehru's position that the political behaviour judged appropriate in colonial India was no longer properly political after independence.

## Colonial Sovereignty: The 'Political' under British Rule

It could be then said that it was only with coming of independence that a question was raised in India about what 'everyday politics' should look like. Politics could not be a 'routine' affair for Indians under colonial rule. For, while the British allowed for a highly limited degree of constitutional and electoral politics in the 1920s and the 1930s, the nationalist effort to rid the country of the British may be likened in its entirety to a 'war'. Indeed, expressions such as 'freedom struggle' or 'national movement', popular among Indians and Indian historians, suggest that nationalist activity constituted, for Indians, something more than the routine, everyday politics that is meant to be the life of a democracy. It is significant, for instance, that in independent India, politics is known as politics (*rajniti*) and has no other exalted name whereas it was known by many other names during British rule (thus, in Bengali, expressions like *desher kaj*, to work for the country or the nation; *shvadhinata shangram*, freedom struggle; *mukti shangram*, the struggle for liberation). This seems appropriate, for the aim of the nationalist movement was to challenge and bring to an end the sovereignty of the British. The overall non-violent nature of the ideology of the Indian leadership should not blind us to the fact that the forms of 'political action' developed during the 'freedom struggle' were like so many tactics of a battle, each of them aiming to challenge, symbolically or otherwise, the rule of foreigners. Hence, violent or non-violent, they all emphasised the overarching strategy of disobedience of the law.

At stake in all this was the nature of colonial sovereignty itself. British colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a political arrangement that, by definition, denied to Indians the principle of popular sovereignty. Indians were subjects, not citizens. The British were admittedly influenced by their own theories of liberalism and self-government. They never saw themselves as settlers in India but rather as having taken on the altruistic responsibility of gradually instilling in Indians the political skills of self-government. They introduced, through a mixture of motives that ranged from self-interest to ideological commitments, some very limited principles of representation into the colonial legislatures but even at its height not more than approximately 13 per cent of the population voted. Anthony Low (1997) has described the British imperial attitudes in India as always carrying an 'imprint of ambiguity' resulting from their efforts to negotiate their liberal regard for self-rule as the best form of government and their vested interests in being imperial masters.

Colonial sovereignty may be likened to what Hobbes called 'acquired sovereignty' in his *Leviathan*. In chapters 18 and 20 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes developed a distinction between 'instituted' and 'acquired' forms of sovereignty. 'A Common-wealth is said to be Instituted', he wrote:

> when a *Multitude* of men do Agree, and *Covenant*, *every one*, *with every one*, that to whatsoever *Man*, or *Assembly of Men*, shall be given by

> the major part, the *Right* to *Present* the Person of them all, (that is to say, to be their *Representative*;) every one, as well (as) he that *Voted for it*, as he that *Voted against it*, shall *Authorise* all the Actions and Judgments, of that Man or Assembly of men, in the same manner, as if they were his own, to the end, to live peaceably amongst themselves, and be protected against other men.
>
> From this Institution of a Commonwealth are derived all the *Rights*, and the *Facultyes* of him, or them, on whom the Soveraigne Power is conferred by the consent of the People assembled. (Hobbes 1976: 228–29)

In other words, an instituted form of sovereignty is one where the myth of an original contract between men whereby they have agreed to invest sovereignty in their representatives is enacted in everyday life of the polity. As against this, Hobbes explained another source and kind of sovereignty in Chapter 20. Acquired sovereignty or

> A Commonwealth by Acquisition is that, where the Soveraign Power is acquired by Force: And it is acquired by force, when men singly, or many together by plurality of voyces, for fear of death, or bonds, do authorise all the actions of that Man, or Assembly, that hath their lives and liberty in his Power.

Hobbes continued:

> And this kind of Dominion, or Soveraignty, differeth from Soveraignty by Institution, only in this, That men who *choose* their Soveraign, do it for fear of one another, and not of him whom they Institute: But in this case [that is, in the case of acquired sovereignty], they subject themselves to him they are afraid of. (Ibid.: 251–52; emphasis added)

Hobbes would go on to make a crucial distinction between the nature of political obligation to obey the sovereign in the two cases, carefully distinguishing 'acquired sovereignty' from the despotism of the slave-master. In the case of instituted sovereignty, the original contract resulting in the sovereignty is the ground for obedience in everyday life of the polity. In the colonial case of acquired sovereignty, Hobbes is careful to point out that it was not conquest as such that created for the conquered the impulse to obey the sovereign but his own act of submission to the victor that takes the place of the contract of instituted sovereignty:

> It is not therefore Victory, that giveth the right of Dominion over the Vanquished, but his own Covenant. Nor is he obliged because he is Conquered; that is to say, beaten, and taken, or put to flight; but because he commeth in, and submitteth to the Victor . . . (Ibid.)

## DOMINATION VS SOVEREIGNTY

Foucault explains this aspect of acquired sovereignty beautifully through a distinction he draws between Domination and (acquired) Sovereignty. If one state simply won a military victory over another, killed or extinguished their sovereign, and yet spared the lives of the population who now agreed to pay the victors taxes and obey their laws, would we have a case of 'a relationship of Domination based entirely upon war and the prolongation, during peacetime, of the effects of war?' Foucault, following Hobbes, clearly says 'no': 'Domination, you say, and not sovereignty. But Hobbes does not say that: he says we are still in a relationship of sovereignty. Why?' Here is Foucault's answer:

> Because once the defeated have shown a preference for life and obedience, they make their victors their representatives and restore a sovereign to replace the one who was killed in the war. It is therefore not the defeat that leads to the brutal and illegal establishment of a society based upon domination, slavery, and servitude; it is what happens during the defeat, or even after the battle, even after the battle, even after the defeat, and in a way, independently of it. It is fear, the renunciation of fear, and the renunciation of the risk of death. It is this that introduces us into the order of sovereignty and into a juridical regime: that of absolute power. The will to prefer life to death is what founds sovereignty . . . (Foucault 2003: 95)

Hobbes argued that 'the Rights, and Consequences of Sovereignty, are the same' in both the instituted and the acquired forms (Hobbes 1976: 252). But Foucault helps us to see what an unstable structure colonial or acquired sovereignty would become once it was confronted by nationalism or even sentiments of anti-colonialism that aroused the vanquished to stake their lives in the fight for freedom. Perhaps the brief moment when the British rule enjoyed some form of acquired sovereignty in India was in the second half of the nineteenth century when the imposition of a *pax Britannica* throughout the subcontinent indeed gave rise to an ideology and a feeling of loyalty to the Empire among many Indians. I do not mean to deny or denigrate the contribution of members of the Raj, official and non-official, who took their liberalism seriously and agonised over the contradiction between colonial rule and the precepts of liberalism. And there were no doubt large areas of life in which Indians were allowed some degree of self-rule within the parameters of British imperial presence, for example, in municipal government, educational institutions, etc. But anytime Indians produced something like a 'disorder' or a rebellion that challenged British sovereignty, one important and undeniable part of the response of the colonial authorities was about reminding Indians of the need to be afraid of the power of the colonial state. The acts of revenge and retribution that followed the 'Great Rebellion' of 1857—literally blowing away individual offending sepoys by cannon fire or even the illegal decision to deny the sovereignty of the last Mughal king Bahadur Shah and to try him was based, as Lucinda Bell has very recently shown in her doctoral thesis, on political calculations about instilling fear into Indians. Sir Cecil Beadon, home secretary to Canning, wrote on 13 October 1857: 'to have . . . (the king) hung on the palace would have had the best effect throughout India just as our omission to do so will be assuredly attributed to fear' (Bell 2004: 142). Even the summary execution of the two sons of Bahadur Shah, Mirza Buktawur Shah and Mirza Mendoo, was prompted by the assumption that 'the execution of such men will strike terror, and produce a salutary fear through the Mahomedan population' (ibid.: 143). Clearly, the fear that Indians did not fear them enough could tip colonial sovereignty over into the sphere of domination.

Teaching Indians a lesson was often a part—not the only element but an important part—therefore of British response to what they saw as acts challenging the sovereignty of the colonial state. A reader of the report of the sub-committee that the Indian National Congress appointed to investigate the British military violence against nationalist mobilisation in the Punjab during the April 1919 agitation against the so-called Rowlatt Act would be struck by the way the nationalists pitted the liberal language of procedural checks and balances against the imperial haughtiness of the colonial rulers. Thus, referring to police firing on rioting crowds in Amritsar on 10 April 1919, the Congress sub-committee wrote:

> Our study of the evidence led before the Martial Law Commission, of the official evidence before Lord Hunter's Committee and the evidence collected by us, leads to the conclusion that there was no warrant of firing. The authorities omitted all the intermediate stages that are usually resorted in all civilised countries. There was no parleying, no humouring, and no use of milder force. Immediately, the crowd became insistent, the order to fire was given. In this country, it has become too much the custom with the executive and the military never to run any risk, or, to put it another way, to count Indian life very cheap. (Hunter Commission 1976, 1: 49)

Indeed, as this report pointed out, any act of 'disorder' that challenged the public symbols of the Raj or the authority of the British was immediately treated as a departure from the code of willing submission that constituted the core of colonial sovereignty. This was surely the spirit with which the British suppressed the Rowlatt Act agitation in the Punjab where the military authorities often spoke to the residents of the city of Amritsar in the language of war:

> Do you people want peace or war? We are prepared in every way. The government is all powerful. Sarkar (the government) has conquered Germany and is capable of doing everything. The General will give you orders today. The city is in his possession . . . You will have to obey orders. (Ibid.: 59)

Such a moment when a challenge to the sovereignty of the colonial power has to be put down with violence always contained a contradiction that was necessary to colonial sovereignty. One sees this clearly in the proceedings of the Hunter Commission that the government appointed to enquire into the violence in Punjab in April 1919 when martial law had been promulgated. Under General Dyer's order, almost 400 unarmed civilians with no escape route were gunned down during the infamous massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. The proceedings unintentionally made clear some of the constitutive contradictions of colonial sovereignty:

> Q: I take it that your idea in taking that action was to strike terror?
>
> A: Call it what you like. I was going to punish them. My idea from a military point of view was to make a wide impression.
>
> Q: To strike terror not only in the city of Amritsar but throughout the Punjab?
>
> A: Yes, throughout the Punjab. I wanted to reduce their *morale*; the *morale* of the rebels. (Hunter Commission 1976, 2: 189–90)

This reads like a statement about the code of conduct of an army officer. But there was more to it. The commission's questions and Dyer's answers bring out the dilemma that British sovereignty faced in meeting popular and nationalist opposition to colonial rule. Dyer himself admitted that he thought it 'quite possible that (he) . . . could have dispersed them (the people collected at Jallianwala Bagh) even without firing'. But his fear was that 'they would all come back and laugh at me, and I considered that I would be making myself a fool' (ibid.: 191). Was this 'I' that Dyer referred to that of a military officer who feared the loss of his official, military authority? Would Dyer personally make himself a fool? Or was he speaking of the authority of the European—a question that cannot ever be separated from the question of race—in colonial India? (Dyer and his colleagues' later decision to force Indians to crawl through a lane where a European lady had been assaulted by a rioting crowd only shows that a considerable amount of race-consciousness was at play in the actions of the military.)

As is well known, Dyer's action at Jallianwala Bagh received immediate approval from the higher authorities including the Lt Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer. But the Commission was deeply divided (along race lines) in its evaluation of the violence of General Dyer's action. Even the majority report (from the European members) made it clear that Dyer's decision to fire without warning and for as long as he did fell into the category of 'error' (ibid.: 45–47). The minority report (from mostly Indian members) clearly said:

> General Dyer thought that he had crushed the rebellion and Sir Michael O'Dwyer is of the same view. There was no rebellion which required to be crushed. We feel that General Dyer by adopting an inhuman and un-British method of dealing with subjects of His

> Majesty the King-Emperor, has done great dis-service to the interest of British rule in India. (Ibid.: 194)

## CONTRADICTIONS IN SOVEREIGNTY

This unease that both the majority and minority authors of the official report expressed with respect to the violent method of asserting sovereignty and the ambiguous nature of the authority that Dyer thought he was upholding point to a contradiction at the heart of the exercise of colonial power in the age of nationalism. Sheer conquest never by itself offered a formal basis for the sovereignty of British colonial rule. Yet the submission of the colonised in an age of nationalist movement demanding self-rule could not be sustained without the reassertion, from time to time, the moment of conquest, or at least without a show of force that extracted only a forced submission. Unwilling obedience, however, made the exercise of sovereignty precarious. Colonial sovereignty, in other words, always risked becoming domination.

The Gandhian nationalist movement that started around 1919 and that continued to be the main strand of Indian nationalism through the 1920, 1930s and the 1940s created a political domain for ordinary Indians: students, middle-class salary earners, the working classes and the peasants. This was a major part of the training in 'politics' that most Indians received before the country became independent. Because of the extremely limited franchise that the British instituted in the country, there was no everyday domain of constitutional politics in which the people could directly participate. Legislative politics was 'elite politics' even when it involved leaders of the low-caste were based on the assumption that Indian leaders did not represent the masses they claimed to represent.[3]

Nationalists, on the other hand, clearly wanted both a representative form of government and an instituted form of popular sovereignty through universal adult franchise. But, denied any mechanism for electoral representation of the people and what their will represented, nationalists had to work out other methods of demonstrating their claims to represent 'the people', methods more immediately visual than the abstract process of the representation through legislatures. The nationalists' answer to the charge that the Indian political elite were not representative of the masses was to mobilise the masses in direct agitational programmes of the nationalist movement. That story is well-known. But we should note that what underwrote this anti-colonial but populist faith in the modern-political capacity of the masses was another European inheritance, romanticism. It is, of course, true that the middle-class leaders of anti-colonial movements—this includes Gandhi—often expressed a fear of the lawless mob and saw education, both political and general, as a solution to the problem (Pandey 1988a). But the fear was qualified by its opposite, a political faith in the masses. In the 1920s and the 1930s, this romanticism marked Indian nationalism generally—many nationalists who were not communist or of the Left, for instance, would express this faith.

Francesca Orsini has recently excavated a body of evidence documenting this tendency. To take but some stray examples from her selection, here is Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi (1890–1931), the editor of the Hindi paper *Pratap*, editorialising on 31 May 1915:

> The much-despised peasants are our true bread-givers (*annadata*), not those who consider themselves special and look down upon the people who must live in toil and poverty as lowly beings. (Orsini 2003)[4]

Or Vidyarthi again on 11 January 1915:

> Now the time has come for our political ideology and our movement not (to) be restricted to the English-educated and to spread among the common people [*samanya janta*], and for Indian public opinion [*lokmat*] to be not the opinion of those few educated individuals but to mirror the thoughts of all the classes of country . . . democratic rule is actually the rule of public opinion. (Ibid.)

One should note that this romantic-political faith in the masses was populist as well in a classical sense of the term. Like Russian populism of the late nineteenth century, this mode of thought not only sought a 'good' political quality in the peasant but also, by that step, worked to convert so-called 'backwardness' of the peasant into a historical advantage. The peasant, 'uncorrupted' by self-tending individualism of the bourgeois and oriented to the needs of his or her community, was imagined as already endowed with the capacity to usher in a modernity different and more communitarian than what was prevalent in the west.[5] The contradiction entailed in the very restricted nature of franchise under colonial rule and the simultaneous induction of the peasant and the urban poor into the nationalist movement had one important consequence. The constitutional law-making councils instituted by the British and the street (or the field and the factory) emerged, as it were, as rival and sometimes complementary institutions of Indian democracy. 'In the (legislative) councils and the assemblies', wrote Shrikrishna Datt Palival (1895–1968) in an essay in the Hindi monthly *Vishal Bharat* (February 1936), 'one meets power and wealth face to face (and) the rulers' rights are kept safe in a temple where (people's) representatives are denied entry, just like untouchables (in a Hindu temple)' (Orsini 2003). The very restrictions put on constitutional politics then meant that the field, the factory, the bazaar, the fair and the street became major arenas for the struggle for independence and self-rule.

It is in these arenas, as several historians of the subaltern studies group have pointed out, that subaltern subjects with their characteristic mode of politics (including practices of public and collective violence that governments would call 'disorder') entered modern public life. The general characteristics of peasant insurgency—looting, destroying, burning, etc., that Ranajit Guha studied in his book on the subject—left their imprints on all of the three large mobilisations that occurred under Gandhi's leadership (often without Gandhi's approval): the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1919–22, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931–34, and the Quit India Movement of 1942 (Guha 1983; Amin 1995; Pandey 1978). The shadow of the 1857 rebellion always fell over these movements whenever they acquired a violent pitch. As Max Harcourt wrote of the Quit India Movement in Bihar: 'The whole procedure was very reminiscent of the rural disturbances accompanying the 1857 Mutiny'. His essay reproduces a large extract from a description of a 'fairly typical siege of a thana office' from the diary of the collector of Ballia with the comment that '(it) could well have been written by his counterpart 85 years earlier' (Harcourt 2005: 318; Pandey 1988b).

By thus appropriating into itself modes of public violence and 'disorder' characteristic of peasant insurgency, the nationalist movement did create something like an everyday language of politics for the people. But this was not in any way the kind of 'everyday politics' that Nehru would look for after independence. The nationalist means of street-politics were like so many tactics of battle that all contributed to an overall strategy of a 'war', the ultimate aim of which was to put an end to the colonial sovereignty of the British. That is why most of these expressions, peaceful or not, of everyday politics of the people had to do with defying the laws the British had instituted, a practice that amounted to challenging colonial sovereignty. These practices came to pre-figure the idea of popular sovereignty in independent India.[6] In addition, it has to be remembered that, unlike the Chinese Communists, for instance, who set up revolutionary governments in areas they 'liberated' in the course of the revolution, the Indian nationalists did not create any alternative centre of instituted sovereignty while the nationalist battle to evict the colonial power was on. Whenever popular mobilisations were on hold, the Congress leaders and other politicians took part in the provincial and central legislatures the British had set up. On independence, the nationalists created a Constituent Assembly, wrote a democratic constitution and adopted the principle of universal adult franchise granting citizenry rights to all eligible Indians with the stroke of a pen, but chose to work through the legislative and bureaucratic structures they had inherited.

## POSTCOLONIAL SOVEREIGNTY

It is an interesting fact of Indian politics today that no theorist of the political in India would remain content with either Nehru's or Gajendragadkar's bemoaning of 'indiscipline' in public life. The very question of what constitutes 'discipline' and why so would be under the microscope. If Nehru wanted everyday forms of popular politics to bolster governance of the country, it is generally conceded now that, if anything, politics in India has progressed in the opposite direction. In many parts of India—though not everywhere, it has to be said, and in uneven ways—politics had indeed become separate from the business of governance.[7] Whatever it was that in Nehru's judgment was politics only in name—actions that he thought were conducted only 'in the name of politics'—today makes up the very substance of much that is considered political by scholars who theorise on contemporary India. My effort here is not directed to explaining how the change happened but more towards gaining an understanding of the nature of the change.

Let me jump several decades ahead from the 1950s and begin with two rather recent 'everyday' instances of popular politics in contemporary India. Both of my examples come from the state of West Bengal, so that may very well make them somewhat atypical of the rest of India. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has been in power in West Bengal for more than 25 years now. The forms of political action illustrated by these two incidents owe something to the forms of popular mobilisation that the Communist and other political parties championed in the state. But they also help us to reflect, provisionally, on questions of political power and sovereignty in India today.

Here are the two events as reported in the newspaper, *The Telegraph* published from Kolkata.

> *Event I:*
> Krishnanagar, [November] 26 [2004]: A mob of over a 100 people ransacked a ward office and gheraoed [surrounded] the superintendent of Chakdah State General Hospital last night for two hours after a patient died allegedly due to doctors' negligence and forced him to write an apology letter.
>
> Relatives of the patient said that 35-year-old Polly Karmakar, gasping for breath, was admitted to the hospital in Nadia, 55 km from Calcutta, around 11 am with complaints of chest pain. The doctor prescribed administration of oxygen and left as his shift ended.
>
> Karmakar continued to gasp for over three-and-a-half hours as the doctor on the next shift was absent. Finally, well after 2.30 pm, an ENT surgeon was brought in and arranged for oxygen. By then, Karmakar had breathed her last.
>
> Health department bosses in Salt Lake reacted strongly to the incident. Director of health services . . . said the doctor on duty should not have left the hospital without handing charge over to the reliever and ordered a probe.
>
> He also took strong exception to the superintendent's apology. Moloy Banerjee [the superintendent] had no right to issue an apology letter without permission from high authorities, he said.
>
> . . .
>
> When the news of the death spread, the Karmakar relatives and neighbours started agitating at the hospital and ransacked the ward office. They returned around 8 pm and gheraoed the superintendent.

> Despite intervention of the assistant CMOH [Chief Medical Officer of Health] of Kalyani, the protesters insisted on an apology letter and dispersed after they got the letter (*The Telegraph* 2004).
>
> *Event 2:*
> Burdwan, [February] 21 [2005]: Nobel laureate Amartya Sen was among thousands stranded on the tracks here this morning as a group of people turned a station some distance away into a battlefield. Train services in the Khana-Ranaghat section of the eastern Railway were disrupted for over eight hours from 6.30 am as hundreds squatted on the lines at Bhedia station, 220 km from Calcutta, and fought police while pressing for a slew of demands.
>
> Sen, on his way to Santiniketan, however, did not have to sit stuck for that long. The district administration ensured that he took a car home from Burdwan station.
>
> . . .
>
> The demands were many—from the construction of a footbridge at the station to erecting a platform shed and ensuring stops for three long-distance trains at Bhedia.
>
> . . .
>
> Tear-gas shells had to be lobbed and 12 rounds fired in the air to bring the situation under control. At least 20 policemen were injured . . . A jeep was ransacked. District magistrate Subrata Gupta said that the demonstrators demanded that senior railway officials from Howrah speak to them (*The Telegraph* 2005).

Clearly, there are genuine grievances and particular histories at issue in both cases (details I cannot go into). They also speak to continuing problems with public utilities in West Bengal—hospitals and transport—and particularly so in the context of the move to liberalise the economy and privatise some of these critical services. It is also obvious that in both instances the language of protest involves breaking the law and causing public inconvenience. The incidents are typical of everyday occurrences in West Bengal; I have collected then at random from newspapers. The very fact that no political parties are mentioned in either report suggests the popularity and familiarity of these forms of protest: people are so well-trained in these modes of expression of disaffection that they do not any longer need the leadership of organised political parties to stage such 'events'.

Their 'routine' nature is also suggested by the fact that the railway authorities had made prior special arrangements to ensure that the prominent economist's travel was as little interrupted as possible. The incidents are a large part of what takes place today not just 'in the name of politics' but rather as the very stuff of politics itself. But what do they suggest about the operation of postcolonial sovereignty?

Something happens in both of these incidents that would not have happened in colonial India. This is the fact of a rioting or violent crowd either demanding, often successfully and as a climatic moment in their activities, to have senior officers, who normally would not deal with members of the public, come and see them or insist on an official gesture of apology. Both are rituals of humiliating officialdom. The officials go along with it because it has practically become an effective method of pacifying a violent crowd. It becomes a gesture of the government eating humble pie, something that a colonial government would have found difficult to perform. The politics of sovereignty in postcolonial India works in these cases by the officials of the state acting as though the state, for the moment, were ceding a share of its capacity to make and enforce laws to a direct and concrete form of popular mobilisation that, in effect, stands in for the abstract ideal of popular sovereignty.

The ritual of humiliating officials also speaks of a very particular form of power. The act of senior officials apologising to a crowd or listening to their grievances is no necessary guarantee of future improvement in condition. If anything, a ransacked hospital ward or interrupted traffic perhaps means more, and not less, inconvenience for the public than before. Yet there is a certain pleasure and sense of authority in seeing the government lose face, to see its officers humiliated. Officials, on the other hand, willingly concede this pleasure as an expedient way of buying peace. The exercise of this kind of power is obviously helped by the fact that the postcolonial, democratically-elected government, contrary to what Nehru once said, is seldom able to establish 'order' with a heavy hand for a number of reasons including the fear of a massive political backlash. This power of the multitude is not a programmatic one. It spends itself in its execution. It is not oriented to a future; nor is it the vehicle of any dialectic of history. Yet, at the moment when a crowd unleashes its power in a situation where the memory of repression has become remote, it creates a vision, however fleeting, of direct and popular control of governance. The democratisation and dissemination of this kind of popular power—something that stands in for 'people's power'—suggests that one perhaps needs to see this very form of power and its associated pleasures as themselves constituting a 'good' that Indian democracy makes available to the people.[8]

## CROWD-ACTION AND PUBLIC ORDER

How this has come to be so is a complex history that I will not attempt here except to note that the question of the place of crowd-action and the need for public order in India's democracy was debated throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s until, thanks to the unfolding dynamics of Indian democracy, the debate lost all political utility (that is, the ruling classes lost the capacity to impose discipline). The legacy of what anti-colonial nationalism had created as 'everyday politics' of the people was clearly a factor. Looking at West Bengal politics alone in the early 1950s, it is obvious that many political leaders of the day did not look on the law as providing any kind of limit to political action, and particularly so in the context of the massive in-migration of refugees from East Pakistan. They would sometimes directly refer (in good or bad faith) to the nationalist movement as a source of inspiration. Thus, Sureshchandra Banerjee, a socialist member of the West Bengal legislative assembly and a supporter of the cause of the refugees, made this speech in the assembly in the early 1950s drawing a Gandhian distinction between legitimate actions and the law:

> As regards to laws, I would like to mention with all humility that under the leadership of the father of the nation we have been taught how to break lawless laws, and if need be we will break laws again . . . To us life is more precious than legal forms . . . we may be tear-gassed and there might be lathi [sticks issued to the police] charge, but it is a legitimate action to commit satyagraha. In a demonstration the people must have the right to violate the law. Peacefully, of course. If there is violence, it is because the government acts violently, not the people. Gandhi taught them this . . . (Srinivasan 1967: 70–71)

When the refugees began to occupy and claim land that legally belonged to others, leaders such as Prafullachandra Ghosh applied similar distinctions between law and legitimate actions to support the move. He was reported to have remarked that 'although such occupation might not be right in the eyes of the law, it could be morally justified on the ground that the government itself had failed to rehabilitate these helpless people'.[9] A nationalist tradition of breaking the law in the name of a morality higher than that enshrined in the law was thus invoked and acted upon independent India.

Also to the point would be instances in which political leaders moved to shame both provincial and central governments into passivity by building up a political culture of demanding judicial enquiries into most of police firing. The Nehru papers, for instance, contain a report from the *National Herald* (22 January 1955) about a debate that took place in the subjects committee of the All India Congress Committee that met at Avadi on 21 January 1955. Trikamal Patel, a delegate from Gujarat, 'had urged in . . . [a] resolution that a tribunal should be set up in every state, consisting of three judges of the district or high court, to conduct inquiry into incidents of police firings resulting in death'. Nehru made a strong intervention opposing the resolution:

> It pains me whenever police resort to firing . . . It is possible that a particular police firing may not be justified. Such a thing will certainly be subjected to a searching inquiry . . . If any policeman or official resorts to firing without justification and this results in death, then there such an official will be tried for manslaughter . . . (Nehru 2000a: 460–61)

Nehru in these years would on occasions underscore the differences between colonial and national armies and the police force:

> We have our armed forces. They have fired upon Indians under British rule. But now they are a national army and so we treat them as our brave young comrades. The police should also be a nationalist force. We must not do anything to spoil this image. (Nehru 2001b: 79)

But this time he was clear that 'the resolution is out of place' for order sometimes 'has to be restored with a heavy hand' (Nehru 2000a: 460–61).

How Nehru and his likes came to lose this debate is a complex history that has not been researched yet. Besides, one might argue that commentators in the 1960s drew too straight and unbroken a line between the anti-colonial creation of a sense of 'everyday politics' and the problem of public violence or 'indiscipline' they encountered. If we get away, however, from their rather moralistic use of the word 'discipline' and take the word in the more sociological sense that, say, the work of Michel Foucault has lent it, then it is possible to see that a large part of the 'everyday politics' of Indian democracy is marked by the operation of a form of power that works on principles opposed to those of disciplinary society. What does it mean to say that India has a sovereign, democratic polity in which power often refuses any deep engagement with disciplinary forms?

Here, it seems to me, Foucault's 1976 lectures, recently published as 'Society Must be Defended', offer us a clue: tentative, provisional, speculative, but a clue nevertheless. In discussing the emergence of disciplinary power as a main mode of domination in the modern west, Foucault triangulates three terms: sovereignty (Hobbesian), discipline and society. He acknowledges that sovereignty—which ultimately gives birth to the language of rights—and discipline—which works by proliferating mechanisms of surveillance and domination—started their careers initially as 'incompatible' modes of power. Yet, as sovereignty in Europe shifted from the monarch to 'the people', there also emerged a certain degree of fraught reciprocity between the two 'because the democratisation of (popular) sovereignty was heavily ballasted by the mechanism of disciplinary coercion' (Foucault 2003: 37).

Hence, in the nineteenth century, the theory of sovereignty, says Foucault, was 'a permanent critical instrument to be used against the monarchy and against all of the obstacles that stood in the way of the development of the disciplinary society'. Public sovereignty

> made it possible to superimpose on the mechanism a discipline a system of right that concealed its mechanisms and erased the element of domination . . . involved in discipline, and which, finally, guaranteed that everyone could exercise his or her own sovereign rights thanks to the sovereignty of the state. (Ibid.)

Foucault goes on to characterise thus the contemporary west:

> In our day, it is the fact that power is exercised through both right and disciplines, that the techniques of discipline and discourses born

> of discipline are invading rights, and that the normalising procedures are increasingly colonising the procedures of the law, that might explain the overall workings of what I would call a "normalising society". (Ibid.: 39).

In Foucault's thinking, there is a third term that mediates the fraught relationship between discipline and (popular) sovereignty. It is 'society'. 'Society' is produced only when sovereignty is able to eradicate all private wars from the social body and banish to the frontiers of 'outer limits of the great state units'. War then ceases to be internal to a social body and exists 'only as a (possible or actual) violent relationship . . . between states'.

> This led, broadly speaking, to the emergence of something that did not exist as such in the Middle Ages: the army as institution. It is only at the end of the Middle Ages that we see the emergence of a state endowed with military institutions that replace both the day-to-day and generalised practice of warfare, and a society that was perpetually traversed by relations of war. (Ibid.: 48–49)

Indeed, it would seem that in terms of Foucault's analysis, the generalisation of disciplinary mechanisms through the social body would have been impossible without the production of 'society' that in turn was made possible in Europe initially by the 'state monopoly' of war (that is, by the sovereignty that Hobbes theorised).

Could one then say that the histories of sovereignty and democracy in India have taken a route rather different from the trajectory outlined by Foucault's? There was a pax Britannica in the nineteenth century but it lost its meaning once nationalism arrived on the scene. Colonial sovereignty, faced with nationalist demands for self-rule, was often reduced to domination. It could never eliminate from the social body its internal wars. If anything, it helped exacerbate some of them. Nationalism created an everyday sphere of politics but the political methods of this sphere were, as I have said, like tactics in a war, the war to end colonial sovereignty. Without this larger goal in view, a simple and local act of breaking the law of the British would not have acquired any broad significance. The war, actually, was not always with just the British. There were 'wars' internal to Indian society that contesting nationalisms fought.

The same crowd-action was also at work in the riots that did not have to do with the British but rather with Hindu–Muslim or caste or linguistic conflicts.[10] The point is, neither colonial rule nor the nationalist movement was in a position to procedure a 'society' (in the Hobbesian sense) by banishing these other wars to the edges of the social body. At the end of colonial rule, India—one could say using Foucault's prose—remained a social body 'perpetually traversed by relations of war' (Foucault 2003).

If my argument is right, then colonial rule, nationalism or even democracy have been unable to produce the form of sovereignty that in turn is necessary for the construction of a 'society' amenable to disciplinary power and its politics. If one assumes that a liberal-capitalist society (for all its faults) is unworkable without some hegemony of disciplinary power, then Indian democracy furnishes an interesting case where the political task of creating the typically modern mix of 'sovereignty' (rights) and disciplinary domination arises not before but after the coming of universal adult franchise and a democratic form of polity. This critical difference from the European or western model is what makes Indian democracy both practically and conceptually challenging.

## NOTES

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Students and Indiscipline', speech at public meeting in Patna, 30 August 1955, in Nehru (2001b).

2. Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Hard Work for Building a New India', speech at the plenary session of the third convention of the All-India Bharat Sevak Samaj, Nagpur, 12 March 1955, in Nehru (2001a: 19).

3. For the appreciation of this point at some depth, I am grateful to my student Arvind Elangovan's research on the 1919 constitutional reforms in India.

4. Translations by Francesca Orsini.

5. For an excellent discussion of this point, see Walicki (1989), chapters 1 and 2, in particular the section on 'The Privilege of Backwardness'.

6. Obviously, not everywhere to the same degree. My statement would apply more easily to regions that had seen violent mass-mobilisation during British rule in India. These regions are most in the north.

7. I owe this insight to conversation with many students of Indian politics and to reading their works. I may mention here Sudipta Kaviraj, Partha

Chatterjee, Thomas Hansen, Awadhendra Saran, Yogendra Yadav, Pranab Bardhan and others.

8. I do not intend this statement to be an exhaustive or summative statement about Indian democracy. One would need to make distinctions between histories of governance in different regions. There are also other forms of power at work in India. I only have in mind the feature that Nehru would have called in the 1950s a problem of 'indiscipline in public life'.

9. *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 22 March 1951.

10. To say this, I repeat, is not to deny the impact of colonial rule on the creation or exacerbation of some of these conflicts.

## CHAPTER 7

# India

## The Road to the First Five-Year Plan

### Benjamin Zachariah

A retrospective on the golden age of Indian planning divides protagonists conveniently into liberalisers and socialists, the former denouncing the 'Nehruvian period' as the source of the obstacles to 'freeing the economy' (Bhagwati 1993), the latter harking back to it as an age of equality, social justice and national solidarity free from the crude materialism and capitalist self-aggrandisement of the post-liberalisation period (Patnaik 1995). Such positions are over 20 years old now, yet appear to continue with variations. Another argument has seen a return to favour since its heyday in the 1960s: that notwithstanding the pretensions to 'socialism' of the 1950s and 1960s, capitalists had far too much power against the state's benevolent (if top-down) attempt to engineer social justice: in one version, this constituted a major loophole in a non-socialist planning process: capitalists could engineer deviations and distortions as private actors in what ought to have been a more controlled and coordinated set of activities (Bagchi 1963; Chibber 2003). Such arguments, often made by self-proclaimed socialists, are somewhat bizarre in that they appear to conceive of the state as an entirely autonomous actor, despite their obvious protestations to the contrary. If indeed a process of economic planning in combination with social engineering was integral to the state's role, then the planning process can be seen as indicative of the class composition of the ruling class.[1] It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the 1950s, and not the 1990s, was the golden age of the capitalist in India in terms of the growth rates and profits of private industry (Balakrishnan 2010).

The nature of historical studies of state planning is that they tend to acquire some of the characteristics of the planners themselves, in terms of imagining the manipulability of human beings and the calculability of outcomes, including the tendency to claim success or predictability in retrospect, neatening the account for the benefit of future planning and legitimation needs. It is instructive, in this context, to revisit a set of debates before the confident proclamations of the Five-Year Plans, emerging from the accidents and uncertainties of the Second World War, and before the politics of the Cold War and Non-Alignment took hold. This is what this chapter seeks to do. From such a perspective, a somewhat different picture arises. The direction of the 'national economy' was seen in *national* terms, envisaged as a class coalition or temporary truce, at a time when state-building attempts were being made, and the nature of that state was up for grabs.[2]

This chapter returns to the moments of foundation of the planning process to re-examine that which seems so evident in retrospect. The planned economy *per se* was a crucial element in the construction of identity and the language of legitimacy of the emerging Indian state, commanding allegiance from diverse groups, to a large extent cutting across political boundaries, and accommodating numerous uneasy compromises. The standardisation of the language of legitimacy around Indian planning obscures the dissension within an apparent consensus which we can perhaps return to only with the help of a reversal of the telos: to read the planning process not forward, but backwards.

The conventionalised emptiness of the language of 'development' made it a successful Cold War project: no one could object to development as a goal, but it was a goal that did not need to be elaborated upon, and therefore remained, as a term, a normative positive even when it was unclear what exactly it was intended to describe—users of the same term could be speaking of completely different things, and therefore publicly agree. Hard bargaining would then happen behind the scenes.[3]

## RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS AND POLITICAL PROJECTS

There were long-standing terms on which Indian debates on 'development' were conducted by the time the question of economic planning became a practical imperative. Claims to 'socialism'—or to some social concern for the poor and downtrodden—were obligatory, and were by the 1940s made by capitalists and avowed socialists alike (capitalists were extremely worried that socialism was in the ascendant, and decided that the best way to protect themselves was to appear to concede 'socialism' while maintaining the 'essential features of capitalism'). Also invoked were 'science', technology and technical expertise as ways of achieving 'modern' social and economic goals—even by the Gandhians, who tried to redefine the 'modern' in such a way as to justify a decentralised, village-based and labour-intensive socio-economic order as more in keeping with 'modern' trends. To achieve these goals, a good deal of 'national discipline' was required, and the 'masses' were to have to make some sacrifices in the short-term, or in the 'transitional period'. And lastly, all solutions to social, economic or political problems had to conform to 'indigenous' values: borrowings from 'foreign' systems were to be treated with suspicion. This was a particularly useful tactical argument used against socialists and communists by Gandhians and by the right (often strategically merging with the Gandhians); but it was also used by socialists to argue that communists were 'foreign' elements controlled from Moscow. The appeal of the 'indigenist' strand of argument in a colonised country was rhetorically powerful, and could often put people who counted themselves in the 'progressive' camp on the defensive. These views could all be contained within a general view of 'development' as 'progress', and of India as a 'modern' country with a rich 'tradition'.[4]

These were formulae that emerged from vibrant and often acrimonious debates in the course of the 1930s and in some cases drew strongly upon and incorporated earlier debates. But this language could hide rather than highlight actual political divides. The centrality of the anti-imperialist struggle and the alliance sought between Indian capitalists and Indian 'nationalism' often led to a deferral of questions of labour rights, wages and welfare—both before and after Independence. This happened simultaneously with attempts of sections of those who thought of themselves as on the left, then organised on a coalitional basis, to mobilise 'the masses' behind the national movement. The nationalist leadership and the state it controlled thereafter claimed to represent ordinary people and at the same time demanded discipline from the labour force for 'national' goals. The central myth that made this possible was that the post-Independence Indian state would be a benign one, or at least a lesser evil.

There were political, economic and discursive conditions for the emergence of this myth, in which the custodians of the national state instrumentalised the 'masses', and presented themselves as intermediaries between the exploiters (capitalists, landlords) and the exploited (workers, peasants). The operation of a language of legitimacy that simultaneously centred on the 'masses' and marginalised them by invoking the 'nation' as the greater collective good is something that has yet to receive adequate attention.

By the 1940s, nationalist arguments, which had been crystallised in opposition to the conventions of imperialist argument, had begun to lose their opponent, with the conventions of imperialist arguments themselves beginning to shift towards a more apparently nationalist rhetoric. During the Second World War, this acceptance, which was often instrumentally driven by the needs of wartime propaganda, caused the dressing up of imperial developmental schemes in nationalist colours (Zachariah 201?; Bhattacharya and Zachariah 1999). Meanwhile, many supporters of the idea of imperialism were able to reconcile their acceptance of nationalist positions on development with their faith in the progressive role of the British in India.[5]

What Max Weber would have considered the bureaucratic rationality of the state, and what has been debated in terms of the 'relative autonomy' of states (from their class nature)[6] could explain the ability of bureaucrats to produce detailed work in wartime plans for the future.[7] Many of these schemes were the work of Indian bureaucrats who shared at least some of the enthusiasm of the 'nationalists' for the project of planning. The specifics of the war situation and the anticipation of post-war plans meant that very directly practical and instrumental questions had to be considered, as well as to be placed within the emergent or existing languages of legitimation, followed or accompanied by finding public justifications for them. There was no way of knowing whether any plans made would ever be implemented.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During the Second World War, relatively abstract discussions about a future Indian economy and an independent Indian state began to coalesce around the problems of a wartime economy and the anticipated problems of adjusting to peacetime. It has been suggested that the origins of Indian economic planning can be found in the war economy, and furthermore that a state apparatus that was being increasingly decentralised from the 1920s was in the course of the war turned into an extremely centralised state, that then fit the needs of centrally directed developmental planning in the years after Independence (Rothermund 1983). Although this view needs some qualification, in particular in terms of questions of intentionality (many of the schemes were practical, *ad hoc* and a response to particular circumstances), and in terms of attempted uses of languages of legitimacy (Indian nationalists were reluctant to concede that British imperialism had been able to author anything of value for a post-Independence Indian state, while British government propaganda tried to dress many of its schemes as Indian nationalist) (Bhattacharya and Zachariah 1999), much thinking on developmental issues was indeed catalysed by the Second World War (Zachariah 2005). In addition, while the state apparatus grew massively in size during the war, it did not grow fast enough or large enough to meet the increased workload placed on it by the war; and it was deliberately shrunk after the war as the state withdrew from some of its newly-acquired duties (Bhattacharya 2001).

A wider and more grandiose set of aspirations: 'development' and 'planning', was juxtaposed against a narrower and more practical set of plans bearing the name 'post-war reconstruction'. Given the nature of debates that had been up and running from at least the beginning of the Great Depression about the nature and meaning of national development, reconstruction, and so on, it was inevitable that the latter set would be read in terms of the former; and in fact, this was recognised by all concerned. Debates among colonial officials preceding and surrounding post-war reconstruction often related to the *presentation* of these proposed policies to the Indian 'public', as part of the government's efforts to manage public opinion.

There were good financial reasons for this. The War Financial Settlement of April 1940 provided that India would pay her ordinary defence expenditure plus additional expenses incurred in 'specifically Indian interests', anything over this amount being met by the British Exchequer.[8] Initially, with India a debtor of Britain's, the costs of extraordinary defence expenditure, war supplies purchases for other than Indian theatres of war, and raising, equipping and maintaining additional troops were adjusted against this debt. But the debt was soon wiped out. Thereafter, notional 'sterling balances' began accumulating in London, to be repaid to India after the war. The optimistic view (held, among others, by Secretary of State for India Leo Amery) that the balances could be considered future demand for British goods after the war, and that consequently, social policy measures could be planned with the possibility of being financed at some later stage, was opposed by the pessimism of John Maynard Keynes, then adviser to the Treasury, who held that Britain would require its industrial capacity for itself after the war (Zachariah 1998). Meanwhile, Sir Stafford Cripps, fresh from the failure of his Mission in 1942, devised a plan of social engineering allegedly to lift the Indian masses out of poverty, and attempted to sell this to his government as both an imperative of benevolent imperialism and as potentially valuable propaganda in India (ibid.). Cripps was later to be a central figure in post-war Sterling Balances negotiations, and was aware of the financial impracticalities of such large schemes. 'It is most important', Cripps wrote, 'that the Indian workers and peasants should realise that it is a British initiative which is working for them against their Indian oppressors; this will entail a proper publicity service in India.'[9]

Publicly proclaimed promises of (mostly deferred, but some immediate) economic benefits to India and Indians became a central part of the war effort in India (Bhattacharya and Zachariah 1999). In the early part of the war, Indian business interests, who bore the main burden of production for the war effort, had to be kept relatively acquiescent, and were therefore a 'priority class'.[10] Businessmen complained that an Excess Profits Tax removed investable surplus from their hands; this was according to the government an anti-inflationary measure—the friction thus created was tempered by the fact that business had the opportunity to make relatively large war profits (Rothermund 1983). Due to their crucial role in war production, workers attached to strategically significant industries were also considered a 'priority class', and given special treatment in order to stabilise factory production in India. The operation of 'war-industries' was declared an 'essential public-service' from February 1941, enabling coercive measures to be employed against the workers with a view to preventing 'mass migrations . . . as a result of panic' from industrial areas.[11]

The actual delivery of essential commodities is not a success story. The government initially viewed with favour the rise in prices of agricultural goods that accompanied the beginning of the war, because agricultural prices had not fully recovered from the Depression, and it was felt that the cultivator deserved this increase (Knight 1954: 34–35), which moreover would keep him contented and docile during the war. The 'Grow More Food' campaign was inaugurated in 1942, in anticipation of the loss of rice imports from Burma after its fall to the Japanese (Famine Enquiry Commission 1945: 11). Foodgrain rationing for the non-urban or the non-'priority' population of the urban centres was a late measure, which began *after* the disasters of the Bengal Famine of 1943 (ibid.: 37–38).[12] Britain had introduced rationing as soon as the war broke out; but in January 1943, Theodore Gregory, the Permanent Economic Adviser to the Government of India, had noted that the rationing of the urban population was a 'formidable undertaking', and the administrative problems of such a course were too great. He advocated instead cheap grain shops for supply to certain sections of the population.[13] Other commodities such as cloth came under rationing later. Official circles took their cue—rather late—from the Birlas, who early on in the war had set up unofficial cheap food and clothes shops in Orissa, mainly for the benefit of Congress supporters.[14]

## THE PRODUCTION OF PLANS FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

'Reconstruction planning' was largely concerned with the modification of wartime controls embodied in the Defence of India Rules, grain rationing, cotton cloth controls,[15] the coordination of Government Departments such as Labour, Commerce, War Transport, Industries and Civil Supplies, and the War Resources and Reconstruction Committees.[16] The proclaimed purpose of post-war reconstruction was the transition from a controlled war economy to a still-controlled peacetime one, to prevent the chaos which would occur if an economy geared to wartime needs and with scarcity of many essential commodities was simply left to sort itself out. Planned reconstruction was further necessary if recovery from wartime shortages and dislocations was to be achieved in the shortest possible time. In India, such considerations were explicitly linked to political considerations and slightly less explicitly to the needs of the British economy, in the guise of the Sterling Balances question.

By 1943, military circles in India believed that Britain could no longer hold on to India after the war, even though the tide of the war had turned in favour of the Allies. The time had come for a plan for orderly departure from India, while preserving long-term interests to the extent possible.[17] This also required a gentler and less confrontational attitude to Indian nationalist aspirations—by which of course was meant Indian elite aspirations, as it was to that elite that power was to be transferred (Zachariah 2004). Various schemes came into being at this time, and older schemes were dragged out of dusty filing cabinets, to be reprinted and appended to new reports (Zachariah 2005, 2001). There was among civil servants a train of thought which fed into long-standing ideas of a benevolent imperialism's civilising mission—now expressed in terms of economic progress (Moon 1944). Such ideas were for instance an important part of the British Labour Party's intellectual inheritance.[18] Others were more cynical in their calculations, remoulding their narratives of their instrumental activities to fit the language required of a new situation (Hutton 1947). Then again, many persons connected with these efforts were Indians who saw themselves as nationalists working within the imperial behemoth. Others were nominally British, but without imperialist sympathies. The Chairman of the report on public health,[19] Sir Joseph Bhore, was considered sympathetic to Indian nationalism.[20] The interest of many of these texts lies in their vision of what constituted social policy, what the role of a state ought to be in a citizen's welfare (the term 'welfare state' was not yet hegemonic) and what connection state intervention, control, or ownership of industry might have to do with socialism, however defined.

The Government's short-lived Planning and Development Department produced the 'Second Report on Reconstruction Planning'. This Report appeared to concede most of the nationalist demands on economic matters, including an interventionist and protectionist policy on the part of the government in order to encourage industrialisation (Government of India 1944).[21] By this time, any proposal which had to be taken seriously had to appear to reject conventional imperialism, to dress itself in nationalist colours, and in addition to accept socialism. The rhetoric of the Second Report duly conceded all these things. The year 1944, the year of its publication, also saw the publication not only of the 'Bombay Plan' of the Indian industrialists' lobby (Thakurdas et al. 1944, hereafter Bombay Plan and Bombay Plan II), but also the

'People's Plan' of M. N. Roy's Indian Federation of Labour (Banerjee et al. 1944, hereafter People's Plan), a 'Gandhian Plan', authored by S. N. Agarwal with a foreword by the Mahatma himself (Agarwal 1944), and a plan formulated by the Planning Committee of the All-India Muslim League (Talbot 1994).

## THE 'BOMBAY PLAN'

Businessmen found themselves in a reasonably happy position during the War, making high and regular profits over a significant period of time, putting existing excess capacity to good use, while able to take advantage of this spell of inadvertent protection and potential import substitution.[22] Nevertheless there were limits to such industrialisation: profits were high, and real wages declined due to inflation, but there was no scope for further investment, producing a strange situation of 'stagflation'. Investment goods, not manufactured in India, were not available, and given the shipping priorities[23] of the period, could not be imported either. Moreover, industrial capital-raising was impeded by the British Government swallowing up all available credit for the War effort.[24] This led businessmen to look to the post-war period for further expansion of industry through capital goods imports and protected growth. They required from the state certain basic infrastructural investment like power, transport, public utilities; they were willing to leave to the state the larger, more risky or traditionally non-remunerative enterprises which nonetheless were necessary for industrial growth. Wherever private enterprise might find it profitable to invest, freedom from state intervention was sought (Chattopadhyay 1985: 162; Mukherjee 1980). In the category of 'basic' and 'key' industries, which the Congress-sponsored National Planning Committee (NPC) had discussed from 1938, existing private ventures should be left untouched as long as they were 'economically viable'.[25]

The 'Bombay Plan', authored by several prominent Indian businessmen, put forward concrete views on subjects directly concerning the operation of business and industry. The Plan began by acknowledging its debt to the NPC, 'to whose labours the conception of a planned economy for India is largely due'. But without the uncomfortable presence of 'socialists' in their ranks, its authors had much more of a free hand to present their views. Its objective, it was claimed, was to put forward, 'as a basis of discussion', a set of objectives regarding general lines of development and its demands on national resources. Politically, it made the assumption of 'a national government' after the War with 'full freedom in economic matters'. The future government was to be on a federal basis, but central government jurisdiction in 'economic matters' should extend over the whole of India. Although the 'maintenance of the economic unity of India' was considered essential to 'effective planning', 'this does not preclude the possibility of a regional grouping of provinces and States as an intermediary link in a federal organisation' (Bombay Plan 1944: introduction).

The reference to the NPC and a 'national government' asserted their nationalist credentials while at the same time 'as a basis of discussion' clause left doors open for the government, the latter already having in principle committed themselves to some form of national government.[26] The reference to regional grouping even accommodated the idea of Pakistan in its then current form (Jalal 1985), while at the same time emphasising economic unity. Businessmen also realised that the time was near when they would have to actively defend their interests against government's 'nationalising' ventures and the commercial advantages or 'safeguards' provided for British expatriate business in India[27] or the 'India Limited' branches of foreign companies which began to be formed in order to circumvent Indian tariff walls from 1933 (Tomlinson 1978).

The main objective of the Bombay Plan was obvious to the sponsors of the project: since it was reasonably clear that the government would soon be a national one, it would get round quickly to dealing with the problem of economic development. In the given anti-capitalist atmosphere worldwide,

> . . . [t]he inevitability of a change in the direction of a socialist economy even in a country like India must now be recognised and leaders of industry would be well advised to take this into account and be prepared to make such adjustments as may meet all reasonable demands before the socialist movement assumes the form of a full-fledged revolution. The most effective way in which extremer demands in future may be obviated is for industrialists to take thought while there is yet time as to the best means of incorporating whatever is

> sound and feasible in the socialist movement. One of the principal tasks of the Committee will therefore be to examine how far socialist demands can be accommodated without capitalism surrendering any of its essential features.[28]

The Bombay Plan was published in two parts, the period between the publication of the first and the second seeing extensive discussions between the government and the authors, the former raising objections of practical import rather than on matters of principle, and appointing one of the latter, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, as Planning and Development Member. It was obvious that communication between an imperialist government and Indian business was still possible, but Dalal was to resign in December 1945 on the issue of commercial safeguards: even if protection of private enterprise could be better achieved from within the government, protection of specifically Indian business could not (Chattopadhyay 1985: 214–35).

The Bombay Plan envisaged a doubling of the per capita income in 15 years, which would, allowing for population increase, amount to a trebling of the national income. The initial stages would give attention to the development of industries for power and capital goods, with the ultimate objective of 'reducing our dependence on foreign countries' (Bombay Plan 1944: 1–6). A qualification was to be made for essential consumption goods, which could be produced by small-scale and cottage industries, which would then not only employ people but reduce the need for expensive machinery purchases. There was an attempt to define a minimum standard of living and public health, and special attention was paid to maternity and childbirth, education and literacy (ibid.: 7–20). 'Basic industries' were power, mining and metallurgy, engineering, chemicals and fertilisers, armaments, transport and cement—'the basis on which the economic superstructure envisaged in the plan would have to be erected' (ibid.: 25). The need for self-sufficiency in food was stressed, and co-operative farming was recommended as a solution to the problem of fragmentation of land holdings— to achieve which 'some measure of compulsion appears to be desirable' (ibid.: 31).

Regarding finance, the Plan envisaged the use of hoarded wealth in gold, which would be available for capital investment due to the faith in a national government, India's favourable trade balance, the Sterling Balances (to be utilised for 'importing the capital goods required at the beginning of the plan'), foreign borrowing, especially from America, and creating money 'to increase the productive capacity of the nation'—planned inflation (ibid.: 44–50).

Part II of the Plan dealt with more controversial issues, essentially concerning itself with drawing boundaries beyond which the state would not be permitted to encroach upon private enterprise's territory. Private enterprise, '. . . in spite of its admitted shortcomings . . . possesses certain features which have stood the test of time and have enduring achievements to their credit . . . we think it would be . . . a mistake to uproot an organisation which has worked with a fair measure of success in several directions'. Although the acknowledged aim of policy was a 'reasonable standard of living' and the necessity 'gradually to reduce the existing inequalities of wealth and property and to decentralise the ownership of the means of production', 'total abolition of inequalities, even if feasible, would not be in the interest of the country' (Bombay Plan 1944, II: 1–5). The Plan recommended a steeply graduated income tax—with adequate remission granted for asset depreciation and income reinvested on industrial and agricultural production. The precondition was a 'national government': 'it is a dangerous thing to vest large powers of taxation in a foreign government bred in traditions of imperialist exploitation' (ibid.: 20–22). It also saw the need for a 'comprehensive scheme of social insurance'—but recognised its infeasibility until full and stable employment had been achieved, 'i.e. until the risks insurable are reduced to manageable proportions' and until individual incomes had risen to be able to meet the contributions required by such a scheme (ibid.: 19).

The role of the state was to 'exercise in the interests of the community a considerable measure of intervention and control'. But despite an 'enlargement of the positive as well as the preventive functions of the State', democratic ideas required the 'assent of the community', and a 'surrender' of freedom could only be demanded for 'well-defined ends'. Moreover, the modification of laissez-faire and the move towards state intervention has transformed capitalism to the extent that 'the distinction between capitalism and socialism has lost much of its significance from a practical standpoint' (ibid.: 23–25). The Plan then proceeded to distinguish between state *ownership*, *management* and *control*. The last was the most important 'from the point of view of maximum social welfare', and it was accepted that this was 'bound to put important limitations on the freedom of private enterprise as it is understood at present'. Such control was necessary for enterprises under state ownership, public utilities, basic industries, monopolies or those using scarce natural resources. State *ownership* of enterprises important to 'public welfare or security' was recognised as necessary, but all state-*owned* ventures need not be under state *management*; moreover, if private finance 'is prepared to take over these industries', they could do so, although state *control* should remain (ibid.: 27–32).

Regarding matters such as agriculture, solutions suggested were more desultory and less well-thought-out: agriculture was less directly the problem of the authors. But a certain deference for private property had to be observed if the sacrosanct nature of their own property was to be recognised. Regarding land tenure, it was argued that in effect, the occupancy tenant was the proprietor of the land as various tenancy acts had already 'deprived the zamindar of a considerable part of his proprietory right'. The ryotwari system[29] was recommended to be introduced in place of zamindari as a form of revenue collection, as the Floud Commission of 1938 on land revenue in Bengal had recommended (this was a safe authority to cite), but a 'gradual application of this recommendation' was urged, with stress on compensation payments by the state (ibid.: 15–16).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSES: THE 'BOMBAY PLAN' AND THE *SECOND REPORT*

The Bombay Plan was phrased in terms that could be said to emanate from the NPC, and was cast as the latter's successor. In this project, the Planners were fortunate in having on their payroll a former Congress Socialist as director of public relations ventures surrounding the Plan. Minoo Masani, having just left the Congress Socialists, combining a rather perceptive assault on Stalinism with an abandonment of his commitment to socialism and a recommendation of a closer look at Gandhian ideas in a more constructive light (Masani 1944a), had just joined Tata Sons.[30] Masani was an adept publicist, succeeding even in turning the material of an economic plan into an illustrated children's book (Masani 1944b). The Plan itself was largely the work of Dr John Matthai, also an employee of Tata Sons, and a former student of Sidney Webb at the London School of Economics, under whom he had written his doctoral dissertation on village government in British India—a work which Matthai himself seems not to have considered too important to his own intellectual development (Matthai 1915).

After the publication of the Bombay Plan, the Government of India decided to take a 'friendly' attitude to the Plan and to refrain from 'destructive criticism'.[31] Sir Theodore Gregory, the Economic Adviser to the Government of India, who was often called upon to articulate the government's position in academically respectable language,[32] prepared detailed notes on the plan.[33] These were intended not only to address 'fallacies and technical defects in economic and financial argument'[34] but also to express agreement regarding general aims and objectives. The Information Department's unofficial note on the first part of the Plan, prepared in pursuance of the Viceroy's request for the India Office to provide 'confidential guidance' to editors,[35] stated that 'there can be no two opinions about the ideals aimed at in the Bombay Plan and there is no difference between Government and the authors in regard to the ultimate objectives'.[36] A consequence of the government's sympathetic attitude to the Bombay Plan was the incorporation of Sir Ardeshir Dalal, one of the document's authors, into the Viceroy's Executive Council as Member for the newly created Department of Planning and Development, which took over the job of co-ordinating 'post-war reconstruction and development' from the 'Inter-departmental Reconstruction Committee of Council'.[37]

The public presentation of the Second Report required that it be phrased in the most general terms possible without actually committing the Government to anything practical. Finance Member Jeremy Raisman advised Sir Ardeshir Dalal to tread softly in what he said on financial matters on the grounds that everything seemed uncertain during the war.[38] The rhetoric of the Government's Statement of Industrial Policy in 1945 was bewilderingly general.[39] The generalities of the Statement were bewildering even to those in the Planning bureaucracy, one of whom described it as 'nebulous', 'redundant', being a repetition of the *Second Report*, 'not strictly accurate' and serving 'only to confuse the issue'.[40] A European bureaucrat, C. E. Jones, seemed to understand the reasoning better when he wrote in response to these criticisms that the Statement was 'highly generalised in form and necessarily vague'—the vagueness being 'understandable' because the Planning and Development Department was seeking 'to secure general agreement on the main features of their approach to the problem'.[41] It has been noted that the Nehru government's Industrial Policy Resolution of April 1948 was kinder to private industry than the Government of India's Statement of Industrial Policy of 1945 (Chattopadhyay 1985: 299–301 and appendices). But there was safety in knowing that there was no question of any of this becoming policy. The contrast between proclaimed rhetoric and intention is evident in the written record. A Planning Branch memo dated 17 October 1944 on the *Second Report*'s commitment to meeting the costs of housing for workers suggested that the sentence 'should not be so categorical and should be more non-committal'.[42] There are, again, larger concerns with which the *Second Report* dealt, more in line with concerns for order: it envisaged an ending of hostilities in the eastern theatre by end 1945, and a consequent demobilisation and large-scale drop in employment. It envisaged the beginnings of practical planning activities by 1946, which it recommended should prioritise '. . . [s]chemes that will employ large amounts of labour', so as 'to prevent the distress and also the possible disorders that might result from widespread unemployment' (Government of India 1944: 2).[43]

But this is a secondary borrowing: the government takes the Bombay Plan as its basis, which at least in part as a result of the Government of India's publicity on its behalf, was the most widely circulated of the plans for India in that *annus mirabilis* of paper plans, 1944. It was even published as a Penguin Special in 1945 (Thakurdas 1945). But the Bombay Plan itself takes what it can from the NPC, which even with its dilute and apologetic commitments to social policy short of socialism, was still too far to the left for business. It is not impossible to see in this an attempt to dilute radical content for potential social policy and for the rearranging of principles to defend versions of capitalism in the years to come—a goal that, whatever other differences there might have been, was shared between Indian businessmen and the officials of the colonial state.

Some of the ironies of the 'Bombay Plan'—and indeed of the NPC discussions— were highlighted by the 'People's Plan' of M. N. Roy's Indian Federation of Labour, a document that showed more scepticism about the universal validity of the Soviet model of heavy industry-led development than the capitalists—which in the Soviet case was determined by the need for 'self-defence'. This argued for an emphasis on agricultural growth to raise living standards, and for concentration on consumer goods to satisfy 'the most minimum essential requirements' of the population. But this was of course within the framework of a state-run economy where demand was not defined by purchasing power, but by 'human demand' and production for use, for which the authors believed private capital would not be forthcoming (People's Plan 1944: 5–6, 21). The problems of Indian poverty 'cannot be solved on the basis of the capitalist mode of production', it was asserted. This view being too far to the left for its authors to believe in its possible adoption as the basis of planning; it was 'submitted to the public, hoping that it may contribute to public discussion' (ibid.: introduction). The authors stressed that they did not plead for a neglect of 'basic industries', but as a matter of relative emphasis, 'it is indeed a little pathetic, and may even prove to be considerably harmful to start, with half-filled bellies and half-clad bodies, thinking in terms of automobiles and aeroplanes' (ibid.: 21–22). This document has usually been considered only of intellectual interest, its existence attributed to the generous supply by the government of paper during stringent paper rationing to the organisation that authored it. (During the War, the government was allegedly rather generous to those who supported the War effort rather than opposed it.)

In 1946, the Interim Government, now led by Nehru, provided another restatement of planning objectives in the Report of the Advisory Planning Board. The Report itself was particularly concerned with a disavowal of its genealogy in initiatives begun by the colonial government, and claiming a new nationalist start, with clean hands, to the project ('Report of the Advisory Planning Board' 1946). Private correspondence, however, is more revealing of the actual process of transition than this simple disavowal. The civil servant and future historian of India, Penderel Moon, whose commitment to the substance rather than the form of the imperial civilising mission saw him stay on in India after Independence, was first Secretary to the Planning and Development Department of the Government of India, and then to the Advisory Planning Board. Moon's probable scepticism regarding the nationalist rhetoric of the Board, and his equal scepticism of its (non)-predecessor Department can be read into his less than grandiose descriptions of his duties. 'One of the main difficulties is the haphazard organisation of Govt itself. Many departments, Commissions and Committees overlap and should be abolished or fused together.'[44] This he wrote in April. In June he wrote: 'The formation of this new [Interim] Government may make a very great difference to our "Planning" work—it may indeed bring it to an end.' The reason for this was that a new government could not run the development of major industries under the Defence of India Rules, as they were hitherto being run, and with the lapsing of the Rules, new legislation would be required to centralise industry; otherwise the subject would, under existing normal laws, revert to the Provincial Governments.[45] By July he noted that the Planning and Development Department had been wound up, leaving him to carry on the residual work as Secretary of the Development Board, with some assistance.[46] This was far from easy without knowledge of what an Interim Government would look like—the possibility of civil war was not something he ruled out.[47] By early September, with an Interim Government in place, Moon was anticipating working with Jawaharlal Nehru himself.[48] This duly happened, and by October, Moon's new job had become clear:

> I'm decidedly busy at the moment as the new Govt has decided to appoint an Advisory Planning Board to review all the work that has so far been done and I have been appointed Secretary of it. I don't think anything useful will come of it, but an enormous amount of material has to be summarised and put in some sort of order.[49]

The summary, called a Report, duly appeared at the end of 1946.

## THE LESSER PICTURE

An important set of tensions between what had publicly to be proclaimed (and was known to be either unviable or undesirable to carry out) and what was relatively protected from public scrutiny and could therefore put forward some useful ideas can be viewed in the smaller reports, not quite so conventionalised. They are nevertheless projects that ask the fundamental question, which sometimes comes through even in a document produced by the colonial government: what should a good (national) state do, as opposed to a bad (colonial) state? And perhaps it is in these reports that it is easiest to recognise most of these developmental projects for what they are: projects for social stability rather than radically transformative projects.

The four-volume Report of the Health Survey and Development Committee, chaired by Sir Joseph Bhore, for instance, makes clear that it has modest objectives: the attainment of a 'reasonably well-developed' health service for India. This, the Report goes on to say in the words of its Chairman, 'may take about 40 years' (*Report of the Health Survey* 1946: vi). Having just stated that the need for 'a national health organisation' should be based on the first principle that '[n]o individual should fail to secure adequate medical care because of inability to pay for it', the Report thus gives with one hand and takes away with the other (ibid.: v). Nevertheless, it provides some interesting highlights along the way, with its special emphasis on preventative health care, especially in rural areas where the tiller of the soil, 'although he pays the heaviest toll when famine and pestilence sweep through the land, the medical attention he gets is of the most meagre description' (ibid.). It establishes, connectedly, a place for indigenous medicine in the future medical system, although establishing a hierarchy of 'Western' medicine above and 'indigenous' medicine below. One of the reasons for this is pragmatic: 'indigenous' medicine is cheaper and more readily accessible. The necessary integration of the two systems was to be accomplished by the larger, official medical system testing indigenous remedies on a scientific basis to establish their efficacy. This solution therefore bypassed a strongly developed and polemicised debate where the 'indigenous' had been, since the 1920s, associated with the 'national' which was further beginning to be identified with *ayurveda* and Hinduism as against *unani* and Islam (Berger 2008).

Many of these smaller reports express concern regarding the availability of money for the purposes of their plans, a concern which is usually underplayed or altogether absent from the bigger statements. Some of the reports are characterised by an openness to a variety of examples and precedents: the cooperatives report looked at agricultural production and the consolidation of uneconomic holdings in cases of collective farming by peasant farmers and state farming by wage-earning workers in the erstwhile USSR, corporate farming in the USA, and cooperative farming in Italy, Bulgaria and Palestine (Government of India 1946). There are also practical reports on specific industries and sectors of the economy: in 1945 it was agreed that the cotton textile industry had to be expanded, but that in the aftermath of the war it would not be possible to procure enough machinery to do this on the desired scale; that yarn should be provided, therefore, by mills to handloom weavers (Government Central Press 1947).[50] An Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee examined the problems of rural debt, predictably advocating a much stronger state presence in regulating and adjusting debt, setting up central institutions for finance, and making use of cooperative institutions, which ought to be given 'coercive' powers in some areas.[51]

A faith in a new state, which would belong, in some senses, to people like the authors of such reports themselves, pervades their rhetoric, and their schemes. Many welfare measures that in some respects were radically ahead of their time similarly imagined empowering the new state to act *on behalf of* the people to be helped, rather than empowering people to act for themselves—perhaps an inevitable outcome of their origins among imperial bureaucrats, however much these bureaucrats thought of themselves as Indian nationalists. The Labour Investigation Committee set up in 1944 by the Labour Department of the Government of India (then headed by Dr B. R. Ambedkar) was given the brief of conducting widespread surveys in several industries on wages, earnings, social conditions, insecurity, labourers' housing and factory conditions.[52] These surveys are mainly just surveys: they tend not to propose solutions (though other committees do that). The Report on the coal mining industry, having provided much detailed information on conditions in the industry, nonetheless wrote its conclusions in the language of 'labour problems': its author, rereading a *Labour Enquiry Commission Report of 1896*, asserted that 'the main labour problems of the industry have remained in more or less the same form in which they existed fifty years ago' (Government of India 1946).

> An average colliery owner if asked to state what he considers to be the main labour problems would say something as follows:
>
> There is scarcity of labour; the workers are agriculturists at heart and are, therefore, migratory; they are inefficient, undisciplined and work as little as possible; they are uneducated, have no idea of a standard of living, are improvident and given more wages would fritter them away in drink and in gambling. The employers supply free housing and fuel and the cash wages are enough for the needs of the workers' family. There are such wide fluctuations in the selling prices of coal that unless there is a guaranteed selling price, it is difficult to launch on programmes of labour welfare. (Ibid.: 127)

There is no indication that the author of the report disagrees with this; he concludes that 'the natural working conditions are not too onerous' despite the fact that safety remains an issue; he blames the workers, and particularly the 'aborigines and semi-aborigines' among the workers for their lack of 'educational and cultural advancement' (ibid.: 127, 129), and sees labour welfare as an issue that is part of '. . . [t]his New Age [which] is to be the age of social security, of a fair deal to the under dog [*sic*]' (ibid.: 133). The question of labour welfare is buried in the issue of production and productivity. 'In the New India which we visualise, if there is to be full employment, all our sources of production will have to be exploited to the very best advantage'(ibid.: 132). Then the question of average raisings of coal per capita in different countries is discussed—hardly in accordance with the brief to the Committee.

Again, these reports were uneven in their tone and recommendations. For instance, a report on cooperative planning recommended the setting up of cooperatives for everything: transport, insurance, housing, health, maternity and child welfare, recreation clubs, eradication of 'social evils' such as dowry, consumers' cooperatives with an emphasis on thrift, marketing cooperatives and ones for animal husbandry or small and subsidiary industries (Government of India 1946). It stressed, among other things, the employment and absorption of ex-servicemen into the executive and administrative posts of co-operative societies (ibid.: 10–11). The report did not rule out the possibility of resorting to 'compulsion' to create cooperatives for 'activities essential for economic progress': the consolidation of holdings, crop protection or irrigation (ibid.: 210). It goes on:

> . . . responsible nation-building departments of the Government with a new outlook will be able by means of education, propaganda, persuasion, demonstration and denial of privileges to non-members to bring about the organisation of cooperative activities along planned lines without resort to compulsion. . . . The cooperative society is the most suitable medium for the democratisation of economic planning. . . . (Ibid.: 210)

One Note of Dissent, appended to the Report, poured some cold water on this optimism: why, after over 40 years of the government's promotion of cooperatives of various description, had the movement failed to catch on? The Note called for a de-officialisation of cooperatives (ibid.).

## THE STERLING BALANCES

The big question coming out of the War was still the fate of the sterling balances. When the NPC experienced a brief revival in 1945, the capitalists were quick to use that lobby to express their opinions. The NPC passed resolutions on the sterling balances, the dollar pool, the prevention of scrapping of war plant or ordnance factories, and restriction of foreign capital investment in India along with removal of the 1935 Government of India Act's commercial safeguards. It deplored the sterling balances' inconvertibility into hard currency, preventing their being utilised for India's industrialisation or general economic development by purchases from countries outside the Sterling Area. This resulted in 'a new and more objectionable type of Imperial Preference'; moreover, India's dollar earnings were locked up in the Empire Dollar Pool, thereby being unavailable for India's trade with the USA.[53] That the sterling balances problem had acquired unforeseen dimensions was becoming clear as it was realised that Britain, due to the devastation of her industrial capacity during the War, would not be in a position to supply India the capital goods required, and Britain herself required the dollars she was custodian of.[54]

By 1944, it was already more than evident that Britain would not be able to meet her promised commitments, even given the will to do so. Nationalist and business scepticism about the promises being made, and anxieties regarding the fate of the sterling balances, were confirmed by reports of the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. The Indian delegation had argued that the proposed International Monetary Fund (IMF) should assist in providing convertibility for a part of the sterling balances, especially in the light of, as Finance Member Jeremy Raisman put it on behalf of his delegation, India's 'programme of considerable industrial development' on which she expected to embark in the immediate post-War years, and the consequent need to finance imports of capital equipment. A. D. Shroff, who had been one of the authors of the Bombay Plan, pleaded for some amount of convertibility, on behalf of Indian business. He realised that a very large proportion of the sterling balances had to be liquidated through direct exports from the United Kingdom, but pointed out that the United Kingdom's capacity to provide India with consumer- and capital-goods would be extremely limited in the immediate post-War years. If, on the other hand, a reasonable proportion of the sterling balances could be converted into other currencies after the War, it would, he argued, assist Indian industrial development, and thereby the flow of international trade.[55] The British delegation insisted, however, that this was a bilateral matter; and the furthest progress that was made was through John Maynard Keynes' promise that Britain would take up the issue of the settlement of the debt 'without delay, to settle honourably what was honourably and generously given'.[56]

After the War, Britain was largely able to alleviate the worst effects of her weakened world position through the preservation of the Sterling Area and the Sterling Area Dollar Pool,[57] and a Commonwealth specially restructured for the purpose.[58] The economies of the Sterling Area remained closely allied to Britain's, with their sterling balances held in London and their dollar earnings tied up in the Dollar Pool. At the same time, the bargaining about the sterling balances and their convertibility into hard currency also began to reflect British economic weakness: her inability to supply India with capital goods and her reluctance to release dollars from the Pool for development purposes, because she needed them herself. The Treasury's predictions regarding capital goods exports by Britain to India came true, as industrial re-equipment in India was affected by Britain's lack of industrial capacity; even post-Independence agricultural schemes could be seen to suffer due to Britain's inability to supply simple capital goods such as tractors, and her unwillingness to release dollars from the Dollar Pool to enable India to buy them from the USA or elsewhere.[59] India's role in the sterling area, and in the British adjustment to the post-War economy, was on terms which did not fit the main purposes of Britain's policy smoothly: the Indian economy was not a dollar earner, and Britain was inadequately equipped as a source of supply to enable her to be more of a dollar saver. Nonetheless, as a Sterling Area country with a huge dollar deficit, and the biggest holder of sterling balances, she needed to be provided with the capital goods she required lest she buy them for dollars drawn from the Dollar Pool against those balances.[60] India was thus incorporated into a broad policy aimed at the preservation of Sterling Area dollar resources, with Britain's effective custodianship of the sterling balances of the colonies, Dominions and the two new Dominions of India and Pakistan (the last two's share together constituting overwhelmingly the largest part of the sterling balances) ensuring her good bargaining power.[61]

## CONCLUSIONS: DISRUPTING THE TELEOLOGY OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

We might, here, be in the realms of a longer story: the continuities of state concerns in the period of transition or transfer of power, the strengthening and recentralisation of the state during the Second World War, and the inheritance of this centralised power by the independent Indian state (despite the 'secession' of Pakistan), and aspects of a longer-term concern with the lack of intrinsic change in the state (Kamtekar 2002). A longer history of the developmental imagination in India, or indeed of the transition from the colonial state to the independent Indian state, needs to be far less respectful of the apparently crucial date of 1947, and far more attentive to trends that emerged during the Second World War and continued into the 1950s.

More importantly, perhaps, we can see that in this larger context that the so-called 'socialism' of Indian developmental planning is nowhere to be seen. The Congress government's December 1947 statement of its economic objectives spoke of the need for 'social justice and equality', the importance, 'as far as possible', of 'national and regional economic efficiency', and the necessity to ensure that 'democracy extends from the political to the social and economic spheres'. References to effective control over local affairs by village-level committees or panchayats could be seen as a concession to the Gandhians. The statement maintained that 'democracy in the modern age necessitates planned central directions as well as decentralisation of political and economic power, in so far as this is compatible with the safety of the State, with efficient production and the cultural progress of the community as a whole'.[62]

The First Five-Year Plan, contemptuously referred to by P. C. Mahalanobis as an 'anthology', was as gentle on private industry as his own 'drama', the Second Five-Year Plan (Rudra 1996: 432). The First Plan aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in food, and consequently spent most of its outlay on the agricultural sector, notwithstanding the widespread desire for industrialisation among the planning classes. For all the tentativeness of the First Plan, it was a relative success;

but this success was deceptive, and would create longer-term over-optimism among Planners who at any event sought to create greater things. Nor were the results particularly 'socialist' by any definition. During the First Plan various voices spoke in favour of an ultimate goal of removing controls over the price and movement of food-grains. An earlier attempt to do this, in 1947, supported idiosyncratically by Gandhi at a time of food shortages, had been a great disaster, leading to spiralling price rises, and controls had had to be swiftly put back in place in 1948 (Duncan 1995). But the results of the First Plan had given cause for celebration; total production of cereals for 1953–54 was three million tons higher than the target fixed for 1955–56; consequently, the state abolished all controls on foodgrains. Also, despite the rhetoric of self-sufficiency a liberal import policy had been followed, with the result that foreign exchange reserves were used up fast—the sterling balances, for instance, were gone far sooner than expected, by 1956 (Zachariah 2004: 187–98, 223–29).

The rhetoric of the period strongly stressed the need for collective and disciplined national progress, for production before distribution could be achieved, and consequently for harmonious industrial relations. Change would come, but it would be relatively gradual, consensual, and rely on the education of the masses and the initiatives of the state. Vested interests would be chipped away by the authority of the state, represented by the national government, which in effect was the Congress. The conflicts within the Congress itself as a ruling party mostly to the right, but led by a left-winger with a social conscience, goes a long way to explaining this: but the so-called 'Nehruvian consensus' (which I have argued elsewhere should not be confused with the views of the man who lent his name to it) was something not too far away from that proposed by of the Bombay Plan (Zachariah 2011). There were of course members of the ruling elite who dissented from the view of a state-subsidised oligopolistic capitalism that would bear the name 'socialism', but their voices were not those that counted.

## NOTES

1. See Bardhan (1984) in this context, which also assumes the bureaucracy to be a class for itself. This is not very satisfactory—is this the fusion of a Weberian idea of status group with an idea of class?

2. This essay incorporates within it the arguments used in my earlier writing, though I nonetheless summarise the important points again here. Readers who are interested in the details are referred to Zachariah (2012, 2004, 2011) and Bhattacharya and Zachariah (1999). Newer work referred to here, which mostly confirms my findings regarding 'development' (though not regarding the Nehruvian period more generally, and especially not regarding Indian foreign policy) must include Carnell (2012), which I had the pleasure of supervising.

3. Many such episodes could be recorded: see, for instance, Singh (1993); Charrier (1995); Carnell (2012).

4. See Zachariah (2012) for an elaboration of these arguments.

5. For an elaboration of this argument, see, for instance, Zachariah (2001).

6. For a starting point, see Poulantzas (1976).

7. For a list, see Hanson (1966: 37–40).

8. Note by Kingsley Wood, Treasury, 14 March 1942, f 247, L/F/7/2861, India Office Records [IOR].

9. Note by Sir Stafford Cripps, 2/9/1942, L/E/8/2527, ff 339–41, IOR. For details of Cripps's scheme, see Zachariah (1998).

10. 'Priority classes' during the Second World War were those sections of the population whose work or loyalty was considered particularly crucial for the war effort.

11. Most Secret letter from the Defence Co-ordination Department, Government of India, to all Chief Secretaries and Chief Commissioners of provinces, 12 March 1941, H.P.F. (I) 15/1/41, National Archives of India [NAI], cited in Bhattacharya and Zachariah (1999).

12. The larger debates on the Bengal Famine and its causes are not a part of this essay.

13. Gregory Collection, MSS.EUR.D.1163/6, ff 14–15, IOR.

14. Amery to Linlithgow, 16/12/1942, Doc 280 (Mansergh 1970–83, III).

15. Textile control began in May 1943, under the administrative control of the Industries and Civil Supplies Department. See Vellodi (1947: 10). Vellodi was Textile Commissioner until 31 October 1945.

16. See IOR: L/R/5/285-302: Government of India Departmental and Miscellaneous Histories of the War. For the military perspective on the same period see IOR: L/R/5/272-284: Government of India War Department Histories of the Second World War, especially L/R/5/280: Transportation and Movements, and L/R/5/284: Supply and Transport.

17. The new Viceroy Lord Wavell, confided this candidly to his journal, written with a vivid sense of his duty to posterity. See Moon (1973).

18. This was evident in post-War approaches to African political questions that held that economic progress was to be a precondition for political independence. See Gupta (1975). On the more instrumental

reasons for this position, i.e. dollar-saving and dollar-earning, see Cain and Hopkins (1993).

19. *Health Survey and Development Committee (1943–45)*, Delhi, 1946, V/26/840/12-15, IOR.

20. This had been attributed by Sir James Grigg, former Finance Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and a member of Churchill's War Cabinet, to Bhore's 'mixed marriage and the parti-coloured results of it'. Letter from J. Grigg to F. Stewart at the India Office, 23 July 1934, PJGG 2/20/6(b), Grigg papers, Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge. Stewart politely agreed that Bhore was a nationalist, but defended him as 'a very moderate and reasonable nationalist', while gently alluding to the possible racist connotations of Grigg's remarks. See, letter from Stewart to Grigg, 10 August 1934, PJGG 2/20/8(a).

21. Between 1945 and 1946, a series of publicity pamphlets were also published, with plenty of photographs, on the subject of post-War planning and reconstruction. See copies in L/I/1/1139, IOR.

22. Such a situation of inadvertent protection and partial escape from 'dependent development' was theorised later by Andre Gunder Frank, among others, in 'dependency theory'. See Frank (1978).

23. During the war, allocation of shipping capacity was done entirely on the basis of wartime and military needs. Civilian needs were not a priority. For one of the more tragic consequences of this principle, see Mukherjee (2010), on denial of food relief during the Bengal Famine.

24. Normally, 'stagflation' occurs when an increase in prices is accompanied by an increase in wages, reducing capitalists' profits and therefore the propensity to invest. Industrial production therefore recedes. See Rothermund (1986: 119–20).

25. See Shah (1949). These contain proceedings of meetings that were held before the war and after the Congress leadership was released from jail in 1944. For a summary of the findings of the NPC, see Zachariah (2005: 213–26).

26. The Cripps formula had been post-war Dominion status with the right of secession.

27. Sections 111–21 of Chapter III, Part IV of the Government of India Act of 1935. The 1935 Government of India Act contained legislation to protect British business and commercial interests in India, lest a nationalist government imposed disabilities on them as 'foreign'.

28. P. Thakurdas papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [NMML], File 291 Part II: Post-War Economic Development Committee, ff 265–66.

29. The ryotwari system of land revenue collection assessed the individual peasant (ryot) proprietor or producer rather than the landlord (the zamindar), whose job it then was to collect rents from the producers.

30. P. Thakurdas Papers, NMML, File No. 341, 'Bombay Plan 2/1/45-20/1/50'.

31. Cipher telegram from Wavell, Viceroy, India, to L. Amery, Secretary of State for India, 12 June 1944, f 93, L/I/1/1061, IOR.

32. Gregory had been, before entering the employ of the Government of India, Cassell Professor of Political Economy at London University and was a well-known conservative economist of neo-classical inclinations. See biographical summary in IOR: MSS.EUR.D.1163.

33. See ff 95–104 and ff 27–29, L/I/1/1061, IOR.

34. Cipher telegram from Wavell to Amery, 12 June 1944, f 93, L/I/1/1061, IOR.

35. See f 93, L/I/1/1061, IOR.

36. Unofficial note on the 'Bombay Plan', f 105, L/I/1/1061, IOR.

37. See L/I/1/1129, IOR; also Chattopadhyay (1985: 178–242).

38. Raisman to Dalal, Simla, 15 September 1944, NAI: 1(4)-P/45: 'Proceedings of the Reconstruction Committee of Council', ff 58–61. The discussions on the preliminary drafts of the *Second Report* and the correspondence thereon show a concern with toning down the more categorical commitments contained in it to more non-committal forms (ff 68–73).

39. Government of India, Statement of Industrial Policy, 1945, copy in NAI: 8(5)-P/45, 'Planning of Industrial Development', ff 119–27.

40. NAI: 8(5)-P/45, 'Planning of Industrial Development', A. S. Lall, Deputy Secretary, Finance, to Additional Secretary, Planning, 11/10/1944, f 2. Another said it betrayed 'loose thinking' and was 'vague' (V Narahari Rao's memo dated 18/10/1944, ff 7, 11).

41. NAI: 8(5)-P/45, 'Planning of Industrial Development', C. E. Jones' note, 19/10/1944, f 12. A. S. Lall, however, in a note dated 30 December 1944, predicted that despite the Planning and Development Department's appearing to 'set great store' by an 'unequivocal declaration' of its desire 'to do everything in its power to promote the rapid industrialisation of India', this would not help the government's public image; it would 'take not even the more intelligent industrialist to argue, and argue correctly, that such a statement means, and can mean, very little' (f 19).

42. NAI: 1(4)-P/45, f 73.

43. *Second Report*, p. 2.

44. Penderel Moon to his father, 20 April 1946, Moon Collection, MSS. EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

45. Penderel Moon to his father, 5 June 1946, Moon Collection, MSS. EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

46. Penderel Moon to his father, 9 July 1946, Moon Collection, MSS. EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

47. Penderel Moon to his father, 13 July 1946, Moon Collection, MSS. EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

48. Penderel Moon to his father, 4 September 1946, Moon Collection, MSS.EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

49. Penderel Moon to his father, 10 October 1946, Moon Collection, MSS.EUR.F.230/19, IOR.

50. The committee was dominated by millowners: Khatau (Chairman), Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Shri Ram, Neville Wadia, Krishnaraj Thackersey.

51. *Report of the Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee* appointed by the Government of India on the Recommendation of the Policy Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, IOR: V/26/313/5. On 'coercion', see p. 86.

52. Record in Gregory Papers, MSS.EUR.D.1163/ 21, IOR.

53. *Report: NPC*, pp. 234–37: 7th session, 8–10 November 1945.

54. Even after formal transfer of power, the sterling balances and their release in hard currency continued to be negotiated, with the advantage due to actual possession in Britain's hands. See IOR: L/E/9/303ff; Sterling Balances Negotiations, 1948. The problem was now further complicated by the need to divide the amount between the two Dominions of India and Pakistan. For a post-independence history of the Sterling Balances, see Carnell (2012), chapters five and six.

55. *Report of the Indian Delegation* (1945: 13–14, 41). Shroff sarcastically commented, 'it appears that although we have four billion dollars worth of sterling balances, we have practically no foreign exchange reserves'. Speech by A. D. Shroff at Bretton Woods, 7/7/1944, quoted in *Report of the Indian Delegation* (1945: 41).

56. Speech by Keynes, 10/7/1944, reprinted in *Report of the Indian Delegation* (1945: 44).

57. For an account of Indian businessmen's opinions on the sterling balances question, see Mukherjee (1990). For an account of the sterling balances negotiations, see Tomlinson (1985). These are both, for a number of reasons, dissatisfactory, not least because they are mostly reportage, and are wholly lacking in a wider context. See files on Sterling Balances Negotiations 1948–1950: Economic and Overseas Department Collection (copies of Commonwealth Relations Office files), L/E/9/303-365, IOR, and the papers of the Sterling Area Development Working Party, L/E/5/76, IOR, for primary sources on the subject. For a summary of the problems associated with sterling balances in the Commonwealth and British Empire as a whole, see Cain and Hopkins (1993: 265–96). Evidence from the African colonies and the Caribbean also suggests that the colonial power's indebtedness to a colony was far from incompatible with the continued flow of economic benefits. See also the debates followed by Gupta (1975: 303–48).

58. See Moore (1987, 1988: 8): 'the endgames of empire in South Asia culminated in the celebrated London Declaration of 28 April 1949, rather than the midnight revels of 14 August 1947'. This restructuring of the Commonwealth and its role in coordinating the economic life of the former Empire, as Amery had imagined, and as by now the Labour Party also accepted, was also reflected in such initiatives for 'development' as the Colombo Plan, which sought to coordinate the development plans of the Asian former possessions of the British Empire. See Charrier (1995).

59. See Sterling Balances Negotiations: Telegram, India (High Commission) to Commonwealth Relations Office, 20/1/1948, copy in L/E/9/303, IOR.

60. It is difficult to accept that 'the economic role of the Indian consumer, with his new-found taste for British capital goods, was seen as a liability' (Tomlinson 1985: 58) outside of *government* circles, who were concerned with providing for *domestic* needs. The tensions between national planners and the private sector, which was soon to appear in India, was a factor here in the British case. The problem was to ensure that home requirements were met and then decide on export priorities as a matter of 'long-term planning'. If priority export commitments, on the 'Russian model', were imposed over a great extent of Britain's export potential, there would not be enough room for private profit. It was considered necessary, however, as mentioned above, to give some priority of supply to the Sterling Area countries lest they seek supplies outside the Area and spend dollars or other hard currency. The solution was to let private profit motives govern exports to hard currency areas while planning exports to the Sterling Area. Private profit motives would govern exports to hard currency areas and would be in consonance with the national need to earn such currency—for which enough export capacity had to be left to private industry in order to 'disperse the impact of the priority commitments' to the Sterling Area. See O.N.(48)85, Confidential, 9/2/1948, Cabinet Overseas Negotiations Committee, Bilateral Availabilities, Note by Ministry of Supply, copy in L/E/5/76, IOR.

61. As far as India and Pakistan were concerned, there was a fear, during the sterling balances negotiations of 1948, that they might be externed from the Sterling Area for not playing the game of saving dollars. But the possible unpleasant consequences to Britain, due to essential items of Indo-British trade such as jute possibly being invoiced in dollars, heavier export duties on tea or diversion of such exports to dollar areas, made the British Government more receptive to Indian demands for greater releases of their balances in dollars to meet their dollar deficit. 'Secret Memorandum on Sterling Balances Negotiations', L/E/9/303, IOR.

62. Objectives and Economic Programme Committee, 31 December 1947, text of resolution reprinted in Poplai (1970: 445–46).

CHAPTER 8

# State and the Making of Communist Politics in India, 1947–57

Javeed Alam

One of the key features of organised left politics in India today happens to be its exceptional concern with fighting the menacing growth of religious sectarianism or 'communalism' on the one hand, and trying to be in the forefront as defenders of the national unity of India on the other. The class battles and struggles for economic relief to the people as part of the moves to keep the class question as the focal point of politics have got pushed into secondary importance. It is not that the left parties are no longer very concerned about such questions. Quite the contrary. But given the extreme unevenness of the spread of their influence restricted also within a few nationalities where the cultural boundaries have acted as effective gate-keeper to check their growth, and the limited political resources at their disposal, a disproportionate amount of their energies are given to checking the communal menace and fighting the forces which have the potential of breaking up India. The organised left may legitimately argue that there is an implicit class dimension underlying their current concerns in politics. Communalism being a divisive force pushes people belonging to the same exploited class into hostile political camps. National disintegration gives strength to national chauvinism which as it grows systematically erodes the hold of the left political parties.

Nonetheless the stance of present-day radical politics is in sharp contrast to what it was in the 1960s or in the first decade of independence. Class struggles and protracted economic battles for the exploited and the oppressed were the marked features of their politics then.[1] There was also therefore hope and confidence in the future. A sense of being besieged together with rearguard actions predominates left politics now; this in spite of considerable growth, even if halting, registered by the communist parties. One can notice this shift in the change in tactics from the united front of left and democratic forces earlier to that of secular and democratic forces from the mid-1980s onwards. Why did such a change come about?

By concentrating on the formative phase of the first decade of Independence, I will try to see if we can find some clues towards an understanding of the present condition of the forced retreat from class politics. As this will be the main concern of this chapter, it may not be out of place to put forth at the very beginning what aspect of the politics will be stressed in the analysis. Crucial to the arguments is the thesis that the Indian communist movement looked at the build-up of the revolutionary potential in Indian society only by, or at least primarily through, working around the state, its institutions and processes and dynamics. Such an orientation to politics in turn led to a withdrawal of attention and activities from the society as such—its institutions and values and particular modes of articulations—as direct targets of revolutionary focus. A position like this would further imply that underlying this sort of conception of politics were two assumptions; first, that to get at the bourgeois state it is sufficient that the state is brought under siege of the exploited and allied classes and that, second, this class-based mobilisation directed against the state is enough to transform the outlook of toiling people into revolutionary consciousness. The error involved in looking at revolutionary politics in this manner leads to a condition of non-hegemonic conquest; that is, the people who come under communist rule or influence for long spells may not acquire a socialist consciousness and may, as they get out of this influence, revert to earlier modes of thinking and political behaviour. Another concern, if not the primary object, of this chapter, is to look at the inner party debates in a way so as to discover the basis for the subsequent three-way split in the communist movement in India.

Before we move on to the main discussion, let us look at an interesting but limiting feature of the left politics in India today which restricts choices about the kind of united front to look for. Unlike in most other countries with sustained electoral politics, there is no organised socialist party in India today. It has been so since the formation of Janata Party in 1977. Tendencies and factions in the former socialist parties have since got merged into the major centrist political parties or formations. So what we have of left politics now is mainly centred round the two main communist parties together with a large number of smaller political formations. All of these, with an exception here and there, are united in the left front.

## WRONG SIGNALS FROM TELANGANA

India entered into its independent life as a state with unusual upheavals; we can now see that they turned out to be without any epic consequences. By upheavals I do not mean the gruesome communal carnage as a result of the disastrous decisions leading to the partition of the country but the popular upsurges around radical demands. These upheavals had displayed a mobility and momentum and a sweep of quite an unprecedented kind. With hindsight we can now see that they lacked a pattern, there was no common direction or similarity of purpose and goal and therefore there was little possibility of unification under a common leadership. And yet these were of decisive importance in the elaboration of communist positions in the Indian politics, in fact within 5 years that is between April 1946 and October 1951 the Communist Party of India (CPI) had four distinct 'lines' each drastically diverging from the other. What gave these upheavals an illusory revolutionary look was the chain reaction across classes and strata and social groups which got into instant militant action from the armed forces and police on the one side to peasants and workers and employees on the other, everyone was on the move across the country. The Communist Party saw this as a moment of revolutionary breakthrough. In early 1948, the CPI observed that

> . . . the process of disillusionment has been quickened since August 15, and the upsurge is asserting itself more and more . . . Never was there so much understanding of the main slogans of the democratic movement; abolition of landlordism and land to the tiller; abolition of autocracy; nationalisation of key industries and a living wage. . .[2]

Such a reading was based on a firm conviction in the party's abilities to move the masses towards a people's democratic state. The

Communist Party, by exposing the national bourgeois leadership, will accelerate the process of disillusionment of thousands, enabling the democratic front to grow and develop sufficient strength to defeat the bourgeois policies and create the preconditions for the establishment of a democratic state, which will really be an instrument for implementing the full programme of the democratic movement and for simultaneously passing on to socialist construction, without the intermediary stage of capitalism.[3]

By believing so it was natural for the leadership of the communist movement to infer that

> The independent strength of the Communist Party of India and the general leftward swing of the people enhance immensely the strength of the left forces and make them the base and spearhead of new unity.[4]

Out of this 'upsurge', one popular movement, the Telangana Armed Struggle, had also grown into a protracted partisan war, akin in some ways to a liberation struggle. The CPI referred to it as 'the revolutionary upheaval'[5] which distinguished it from what was happening in every other state. Telangana was to become the model for the communist movement in India.

The real way out is the way of the heroic people of Telangana. The solution to this question (United Democratic India) is on the battle-field. The heroic people of Telangana, the great example of their fight against autocracy, not only shows what will happen inside the states, but also what will be the real future of India and Pakistan. That is the way the victorious people must march to freedom and real democracy.

Therefore we respect this battle, this struggle inside Hyderabad, of the people of Hyderabad, as a struggle of new type. We must be proud to say that here at least there is the force that will achieve Indian liberation.[6]

The party goes on to add:

> The question is whether the people will go the Hyderabad way or the Kashmir way; and our duty is to make the people go the Hyderabad way. If we can create this spirit of revolution, . . . among the masses, among the toiling people, we shall find reaction collapsing like a house of cards.[7]

Developments in Telangana were to become of quite some importance because they kept on sending all the wrong signals. The signals were, as we will see, read differently by the two main groups in the party who were convinced that the revolution was round the corner. All the other major centres of struggle saw a decline after Independence, e.g. Tebhaga gave way under communal pressures, the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle was brought down by early 1948 through brutal repression, the RIN [Royal Indian Navy] rebellion and other revolts in army and police were soon checked and similar was the case with working class struggles and mass unrest. But Telangana was very different.[8] Nine months before the entry of Indian army in Hyderabad, that is, immediately with independence, the simple peasant revolt against feudal oppression and Nizam's autocracy had grown into a partisan struggle for liberation. More important than the fact that the 2,000-plus villages were liberated and base camps established, land re-distributed among poor peasants, feudal levies abolished, etc. was the intensification of attacks on Razakars (armed volunteers fighting for Muslim privileges and Nizam's sovereignty over Hyderabad) and jagirdars. The *dalams* (guerilla squads) were enthusiastic under the wholly wrong impression that the Indian army has entered Hyderabad to free them of Nizam's oppression and Razakars' terror. But soon when it was seen that the army was busy re-establishing the old officialdom, rehabilitating the runaway landlords, even including the Razakars who had got co-opted into the Congress, protecting the other Razakars in camps from the wrath of the dalams, the peasant armed resistance turned against the Indian army. The dalams vigorously attacked the Indian army and fought it with courage. While the entire movement remained confined to the two districts of Warangal and Nalgonda, in the initial phase of the battles against the Indian army, the dalams did quite well; they got away with the attacks. What is however important is that the movement spread to new areas (new taluqs and villages within these two districts) and more land was redistributed together with the formation of Soviet-like village councils exercising power effectively. These were the signals that convinced the CPI leadership that Telangana was soon going to be the pattern all over the Nizam state as well as Andhra and then for the rest of the country.

Such were the signals and the assessments based on them by the CPI just after the transfer of power. The deceptive simplicity in which the upheavals were viewed is quite obvious.

## REVOLUTIONARY VISIONS

One important but curious feature within the nationalist movement in India visible right up to 1948–49, which the communists at that time never really comprehended, was that the popular upsurges and agitations in which people took massive initiative and went in for large-scale self-mobilisations went far beyond the limits set by the nationalist leadership; and yet when the Congress leadership moved in to contain them the people, however disappointed with the Congress Party for putting the brakes, continued to repose, in an overall sense, faith in the Congress as the leader of the national movement. The complexity really was that the people were ready to go far beyond in struggle than the Congress wanted, and this superficially brought them closer to radical positions but were not prepared to politically move over into the left political parties. This discrepancy, or paradox, between people's struggling propensities and their stable political allegiance was the crucial factor during that period. Failure to grasp this deflected the political understanding of the CPI into illusory revolutionary visions while the Congress became the biggest beneficiary of the great popular upheavals. Misreading social disturbances or simple convulsions in society as insurrections was one thing. But the CPI compounded matters by altogether refusing to recognise that India became independent in August 1947. It looked at the transfer of power as the result of unacceptable compromises by the nationalist leadership. It could therefore declare that

> The so-called "transfer of power" was one of the biggest pieces of political and economic appeasement of bourgeoisie which was necessary to strike a deal over the manpower and resource of a vast territory, though as a junior partner, was the dream of the bourgeoisie and it has realised it. From the standpoint of revolution all that it means is that henceforth the bourgeoisie will guard the colonial order.[9]

This was so because

> The way to bar the revolution, to save the old order, was to purchase the very leaders who were at the head of the national movement. . .[10]

It goes on to add that,

> The establishment of the central government headed by Pandit Nehru . . . does not mean that the Indian people have won either freedom or independence, nor does it insure that they will be moving in the direction of democracy and freedom for Indian people.[11]

Therefore the 'state it has won is dependent on imperialism and is a satellite state'.[12]

There was therefore very little that was negotiable within the range of popular aspirations and demands with a state power which was only a disguise for the continued depredations by the British finance capital. India continued to be a colony ruled by the 'imperialist-bourgeois-feudal combine'. The party in such a situation had no choice but to get on with the state power and wage a liberation struggle. The party was not going to shun ordinary parliamentary politics or mass work in front organisations or other elementary forms of protests and agitations or use open forums to criticise and expose the government.

But as the situation was 'full of revolutionary possibilities',

> The forms of struggle are determined by our strategic objective. . . . The objective of over-throwing the bourgeoisie combined with the existence of revolutionary period and the rapidly moving revolutionary developments impose on us the military and revolutionary forms of struggle and organisation. Hence strikes, agrarian struggles, armed conflicts, general strikes, political strikes—all heading towards insurrection—such are the forms of struggle that flow from the situation. Corresponding to that are also the forms or organisation which are revolutionary peasants committees (Telangana), or strike committees, illegal factory committees, or peasant committees—to conduct the struggle, or squads, guerilla or volunteer squads to defend the workers and peasants, which develop into an instrument of attack also.[13]

Such was the understanding of the communists in India in the first years of independence. This broad overview of Indian reality which was shared by an overwhelming majority in the party had taken definite shape a few months after the Independence but was approved only at the second congress of the party held in Calcutta in

February–March 1948, with B. T. Ranadive as the general secretary. Since then it has been known as the Ranadive line. We will see how this line could not provide for a stable basis of politics for the communist movement and how inner-party differences worked to throw out one line after another within a short period of three years. It is also interesting to note that the unity that the communist movement achieved at the time of Independence on this broad platform for political struggle represented a sharp break with the year preceding the Independence.

As late as April 1946, the Central Committee (CC) of the party with P. C. Joshi as the general secretary had in its resolution on the political developments noted that,

> . . . inside the party some comrades loosely begin to talk about Congress ministries being fascist or semi-fascist. The proper characterisation of the Congress and League ministries is that they are popular ministries . . . because the organisations they represent are the biggest popular organisations of our country, embodying in howsoever a distorted and wrong way, the freedom urge of the vast majority of our people. In addition the Congress is committed to a broad democratic programme of national reconstruction, however reformist it may be.[14]

Thus,

> Our tactical line is based on the approach that the political differences between us, the Congress and the League should not come in the way of co-operation between all—in people's common interest, which we are all pledged to safeguard and implement. . . .[15]

The assessment made in the Second Congress characterised this understanding as 'right reformist deviation' and the tactical line as 'trailing behind the bourgeoisie'.

Accordingly the most objectionable feature—the root cause of all deviations—was the view of the then Central Committee (CC) that the bourgeoisie in India is in opposition to imperialism and is therefore interested in genuine independence. In December 1947, the CC of CPI met and reviewed the entire situation. It adopted a statement of policy and a document setting out the policy of revolutionary defence against the collaborationist policy of the bourgeois leaders. It specifically rejected the notion of the oppositional role of the bourgeoisie and clearly spelt out for the first time that the bourgeoisie leads a government of collaboration and surrender. This meeting also completely equated the leadership of the national movement with the bourgeoisie by declaring unequivocally that the Congress high command which 'represented it had gone over to the camp of imperialism'.[16] This CC meeting was crucial in laying down the ground rules of communist politics for the next many years to come.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE BOURGEOISIE

From now on right through to the split in CPI and the formation of CPI(M) in 1964 and beyond to the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI(ML) parties from late 1960s onwards, the assessment of the bourgeoisie is going to be the focal point of the inner party debates and of protracted polemics during the periods leading to the splits and afterwards. The characterisation of the state in India, of the nature of governmental leadership, the assessment of various other political formations and so on are going to hinge on how the bourgeoisie is assessed. Whether it is *oppositional* or *collaborationist* or plays a *dual role vis-a-vis* imperialism are forever going to be crucial questions in the articulation of communist politics. To put it theoretically, as theory is understood in the communist vocabulary, the position, to provide a brief summing up of the contending tendencies would be something like this: if you overestimate the oppositional capacity of the bourgeoisie you also end up over-assessing its democratic potential and land up in 'right reformist deviation'. Contrariwise if you overplay the collaborationist role of the bourgeoisie, then it leads to 'left-sectarian' errors and may also land you up in liquidationist adventurism.

By 1948, the tendency arguing that the bourgeoisie is oppositional was totally isolated, defeated and those who stuck to it were thrown out of the party. The inner party debate now took a curious turn after the Second Congress. Serious differences arose between the polithuro (PB) and the Andhra State Committee which was leading the Telangana partisan war. Ranadive took the position that the political thesis of the Second Congress committed the party to a revolutionary insurrection on the lines of the Russian revolution. The Andhra Committee argued that Telangana suggests that the Chinese path is something more in tune with the Indian conditions. The outcomes of this tussle in the party are important only because they throw light on a facet of Communist Party's history in India, which is, for some reason, not too well known.

In the beginning, the line advocated by PB prevailed and preparation was made to launch a railway strike on 9 May 1949 which was to be the beginning of a country-wide working class insurrection. All this ended in big fiasco. The workers refused to come out. The cadres were thrown in jails. The leadership hit back by urging the middle ranks for not working seriously for the success of the strike. There was great unease and consternation in the party. At this time, an editorial appeared in *For a Lasting Peace for a People's Democracy*—the official organ of the Communist Information Bureau—advocating a change in the line. This eventually led to the exit of Ranadive and the assumption of leadership by C. Rajeshwar Rao as the general secretary of the party in June 1950.

What followed this was an incredible playing out of counter interpretative exercises on the basis of the same understanding of the Indian state and the class forces. Cutting short the details two points deserve attention. The line now adopted unequivocally stated that,

> The present stage of revolution essentially though not exactly is similar to that of the present stage of Chinese revolution, the stage that opened since 1927 bourgeois offensive against communist and working class.[17]

It adds immediately afterwards,

> The offensive launched by the Nehru government against CPI . . . is practically nothing but a cruel civil war let loose by the imperialist-bourgeois-feudal combine against the working class, peasants and other toiling masses.[18]

The only option for the party was felt to be one where,

> . . . even day to day partial struggle have to be fought armed or semi armed.[19]

And

> . . . the time has come to think in terms of guerilla warfare (Chinese way) against the military onslaught of the Nehru government, which is bent on mercilessly liquidating us.[20]

If the earlier PB was talking of working towards the creation of 'insurrection', the present PB saw a 'civil war' already on. It attacked the earlier understanding as 'adventurism' partly because, wrongly working for insurrection, it relied on frontal attack. In the state of civil war going on now, the guerilla action was taken to be the right revolutionary Marxism-Leninism. Self-satisfaction in sectarian kite-flying reached its heights! Earlier adventurism was due to, one can infer on the basis of the understanding of the new leadership, not *overestimation* but *underestimation*. Now the clash between the armed forces of the people and those of the Nehru government, but not frontally, was going to determine the fate of the newly created Indian state.

This line came as a bolt from the blue for most of the party activists outside Andhra and completely paralysed the party. This phase of the party history is not too well known because the PB and the CC could not take the line down to the cadre or even the middle ranks. There was great confusion within the party. The party headquarters was now to be the centre of dissent.

It was soon challenged by three leading members of the party—Ajoy Ghosh, Ghate, and Dange. The document[22] prepared by them accepted (a) the overall characterisation of the transfer of power, (b) character of the state as colonial, and (c) the leadership under Nehru as collaborationist and so on. But it debunked the ideas of the Chinese path (guerilla action and liberation zones and armies) or the Russian path (general uprising and insurrection and the armed struggle in general); it reposed greater faith in working class action and all forms of partial struggles to prepare the people for revolutionary action. Furthermore, it felt that the illusions of the people about the Nehru government were much more deep rooted together with the fact that the party, both organisationally and in the spread of its influence, was very weak.

The document was widely circulated in the party and, talking to party functionaries, one gets the impression that it was well received. But it created a deadlock. No one for sure knew which way to move. It was therefore decided to seek 'fraternal' international advice.[23] A delegation of four, two from those who had prepared this dissenting document (Ajoy Ghosh and Dange) and two from the PB (Rajeshwar Rao and Basavapunniah), was off to Moscow and stayed there for four months.

## 'INDIAN' REVOLUTIONARY PATH

The results of this was that the CPI got for the first time in its 30-year history a (Draft) Programme and a perspective on tactics known as the 1951 Tactical Line. The Programme was accepted in a specially convened Party Conference in Calcutta in (9–15) October 1951 together with a Statement of Policy. The document on tactical line was adopted by the CC in April 1951 and circulated illegally. A legal version was adopted at the Calcutta Conference. The programme was further approved by the third party congress in Madurai in December–January 1953–54 with one amendment in para 29.

One immediate result was the withdrawal of the Telangana armed struggle on 13 October 1951 and the party prepared itself for the forthcoming first general elections for Parliament. It rejected both the Chinese or Russian paths as appropriate for Indian conditions. It shunned all talk of armed struggle in the then existing conditions but talked of a specifically Indian revolutionary path. But what is also important is that it accepted the basic premises about the Indian state and the leadership of the government. But there was a mellowing in the tone of the formulations advanced. Compare this formulation from the programme with those cited earlier.

The people of India are gradually realising the meaning of this state of affairs and are coming to realise the necessity to change this government of landlords and princes, this government of financial sharks and speculators, this government hanging on to the will of the British commonwealth, the British imperialists. The disillusioned masses are slowly rising in struggle, no longer able to withstand this slow starvation and death. They are rising in struggles of the working classes in towns and the resistance of peasantry in the countryside.[24]

India still remained 'the last biggest dependent semi-colonial country in Asia still left for the enslavers to rob and exploit'.[25] Still, as I see it, the programme signifies some important steps forward. Two points are worth noting. First, the pet mistake of the party of confusing every discontent, every democratic urge of the people with revolutionary upsurge was finally overcome. This had long-term beneficial consequences from the point of view of tactics. Second, while still referring to India as semi-colonial, there is an important change in moving from the dogmatism of belief that the people want the *immediate overthrow* of the government to the more modest assertion that they want a *change* or *replacement* of the government; before the programme the call was for a final assault, now the party prepared itself to nibble at the state for a long time. This too had far-reaching repercussions on how to go about conducting struggles.

To have the programme for the first time was in itself important. But the 1951 party programme is an interesting instance of understanding arising out of a contra-factual imagination. Looked at from within the perspective of how communists come to certain generalised conclusions, this document suffers from, it seems to me, three major infirmities. First and foremost, it is above all important how global contradictions are understood and integrated with the contradictions within any state; the logical relations, in the way the programme is conceived, have to be one of correspondence and harmony between the two sets of contradictions. Now if after the victory over fascism socialism was becoming stronger, new socialist states were emerging, colonialism breaking up and imperialism retreating, national liberation movements in China, Vietnam and Korea on the threshold of victory and so on, then, in this context, Indian Independence could not be treated as an isolated instance. If it was part of a global sea change, the question to be asked then was: how is the Indian state in the same *stage* after independence as it was before? What was the implication of calling it a 'satellite state' and its rulers as 'stooges'? This therefore is the second shortcoming of the programme because it is supposed to also determine the *stage of development in society* from which follow the perspective and strategy and tactics. Furthermore Indian capitalism was not only growing but showing all the signs of using the state power to fill in the economic space opened by the British withdrawal as revealed, among others, in the Bombay Plan (1946) which had the blessings of Indian monopoly capital. A Communist Party Programme, third, imposes a pre-requisite of saying what are the relations of production and other social relations and, in the way they are situated in the global context, how they facilitate or work as fetters on the development of society; we find an embarrassing silence on this. All these, as we will see later, soon divided the party internally and led to interminable debate till it got split in 1964; in fact by the time of the Sixth Party Congress in 1961, the party was *de facto* divided, but these are issues not exactly within the scope of this chapter.

## NEWLY-INDEPENDENT STATE AND POPULAR AGITATIONS

Let us briefly pause here and see how the newly-independent state in India was taking shape, how it was to prop itself up in the face of the initial upheavals and how, theoretically, it was going to relate to Indian society in its transformative project, and how all this was slowly being worked out. In the face of the communal carnage and the problems of integrating Princely States like Hyderabad or Junagarh or even in a different way in the case of Kashmir and the war with Pakistan it had no choice but to act tough and in doing so it relied entirely on the coercive apparatus. As far as the popular upheavals were concerned, whether in Bengal or Tranvancore-Cochin or Hyderabad or with workers and employees and others, it had, at least theoretically, two choices. It could use the popular upsurge to start the alteration of the state institutions in a popular direction. It could alternatively rely on the inherited colonial coercive institutions to subdue popular movements. Given the alignment of forces within the Congress Party, the first option would have involved destabilising political initiatives. But these may have had beneficial consequences in the long term, grounding the state on a more responsive basis. The choices made then to rely entirely on the inherited bureaucracy and police and armed forces to contain and beat back the popular upheavals and agitations was to have long-term consequences. It allowed these structures of power—constructed in a manner to insulate them from popular pressure or accountability—to acquire a certain degree of permanence by making the state dependent on them. It had one immediate repercussion for power in India. The state in India could not become the inheritor of the values and aspirations of the national movement. One of the purposes of the national movement was to question in a sustained manner the logic of the colonial state. What, on the contrary, happened was that the nationalist leadership simply stepped into everything left by the colonial power; most of it is still intact.

We thus have with us today the state institutions whose character has continued to be essentially of a derivative nature. The transformative impulses carried within the national movement and the schemes of emancipation or aims to empower the underprivileged and disenfranchised sections of society which were thought about were to become dependent for realisation only through relying upon these derivative state institutions. This situation contained one of the underlying contradictions behind the political economy of planned social changes in India. This contradiction has many-sided implications. Observable features of post-Independence politics like radical ideological postures and timidity in translating them into policy packages, reasonable policy decisions and legislations getting subverted in the process of implementation get explained through this contradiction. After all these derivative institutions are the means through which reactionary forces and vested interest work their way towards sabotage. In turn, these institutions are also the instruments which enhance the political clout of such forces. It is simplistic to say that these forces can subvert the legislations only because they have the political clout. What we have is a much more reciprocal relations of reinforcing power and entitlements and the Indian bureaucracy is one such network which sustains the power of the privileged.

Let us go into another implication for the structuration of the political process when the state comes to be the only mechanism for the possible realisation of the transformative social projects. Let us go a little closely into this as it is important for a few points I want to raise in this analysis.

Together with the assumption of state power, the Congress set about assimilating the society, in its entirety, into the state.[26] The liberal notion of the autonomy of society was at no point explicitly rejected nor is there evidence that in a thought-out way it was suspect. But the way the strategies of economic transformation for the well-being of the people, social emancipation of the oppressed and marginal, entitlement to the underprivileged and empowering them were conceived, the autonomy of society and its varied impulses—democratic and egalitarian—were to express themselves mainly through the voice of the state and secondarily through the channels and under conditions approved by the state.[27] This would express itself in look at the women question, the tribals, the less formed and oppressed nationalities, the untouchables—all of whom remain even today marginal to the 'national mainstream'—the voice of the state is supposed to be the sole authentic voice. The state knows better what these strata and groups need than what they themselves know. Those who speak on behalf of the state are men in a patriarchal ordering of gender relations and are successful people cut off from the day-to-day world of the marginal people. The voices of the people may be wrong but if people are to be treated as subjects then an open, sustained dialogue is the minimum that is required.

In actual day-to-day practice this constituted an indirect denial of the autonomy of the society. Any spontaneous expression of aspirations or discontent in the shape of agitations even when without militant overtones but challenging the legitimising claims of the state became suspect in the eyes of the government. When such agitations or movements were conceived and led by the radical opposition, these were often treated as anti-national. A queer term, 'politically motivated', was inserted into the political vocabulary in India to condemn such popular movements. This did, one can conjecture, incalculable harm to the Indian society and, by its reverse impact, to the state.

This way of handling popular movements made people withdraw, whenever defeated or pushed back by the naked display of the might of the state, into their private worlds of inherited beliefs and culture. It is there in this world of 'primordiality' and pre-reflective silence of socially received notions that they recomposed their lives as something liveable. In such a world of social existence, when conditions of life are felt to have gone very bad and people become exasperated, it is this refuge that provides the ground for sustenance and by necessity the articulation of the popular discontent. As time went on, with the sheer magnitude of stagnation of social life in India remaining unchanged, we have been witness to more and more of this phenomenon becoming prevalent in Indian politics. This slowly eroded the possibilities of sustained secular politics and the Indian state as the vanguard of secular positions retreated leaving the political terrain to obscurantist forces. It is a fact of some importance, somehow not clearly noticed so far, that the more wanton forms of communal vandalism crystallising in the recent phase are systematic extensions on the retreat of ordinary people into their respective communities. People on the move, this is how I tend to read Indian politics, with strong emancipatory hopes developing a greater propensity to overcome the limitations into which they are socially made to live.

Let me come back from this digression about the suspiciousness of the Indian state *vis-a-vis* popular agitations and radical moves. An assertion made in such a bland manner may perhaps look indefensible. So let us see it in more concrete terms. How was the new independent state settling to a democratic life, relating itself to Gandhi's suggestions and reservations and criticisms, to his agitations and fasts and so on? The state leadership was in no way capable of moving against Gandhi nor could it explicitly denounce his moves. But it has by now become quite established that large sections of the ruling classes were either feeling a sense of loss and incomprehension *vis-a-vis* his moves or were finding him an obvious nuisance. His moves were being viewed as of damaging consequence for the stabilisation of the power of the new state. Gandhian protests were, in my view, the defiant voice of the society refusing to be assimilated by the state; whatever may be its ideological claims or promises of future and our differences with these.

If this is how the state was to view the voice of protest from the 'father of the nation',[28] one can well imagine how it could be disposed towards radical popular movement, especially in the shape of militant peasant and working class protests. Very large sections of the masses were in stir. They were all demanding an end to all that was autocratic or feudal in its social content. They were asking for new entitlements to land and other resources and making claims to power. All this was in tune with Congress proclamations when it was articulating anti-imperialist and anti-feudal concerns during the national movement. Congress now looked at everything in terms of stable political life for the 'nation' and it saw that stability in terms of the legitimacy of the state. The state chose to repress, if need be with armed might, the more radical and militant movements and to push back and contain the inconvenient ones, whether for linguistic states or for land reform.[29] After the abolition of zamindari or other big landed estates, all the other land reforms the state conceived and over time left half implemented provide the classic instance of not even trying to listen to the affected people. All sections of peasantry below the substantial owners were bypassed in silence.[30]

## STATE–SOCIETY RELATIONSHIP

I have already shown in some detail what set the tone of communist politics immediately after Independence. The setting of upheavals and the naive overestimation of their revolutionary potential led it to evolve grossly inappropriate strategic concepts. I have also gone into an aspect of the making of the Indian state as it provided a constant reference point to the politics of the communist movements in India. The conceptual assimilation of society by the state was to have long-term ramification for politics in India, or, for that matter, anywhere else where the socio-economic transformations are important on the agenda of the governments. Such states tend to, in general, silence the self-articulation of people's understanding of what constitute the significance in life. The state defines the world of people, the society simply becomes a recipient of the enlightened ideas of those who control the state. Here specifically, given the male and Western elitist definitions of socially significant and necessary, there may be many groups or strata in society whose problems may be of greater importance for social emancipation than generally perceived by the prevalent dominant modes of thinking. The state can always have blind spots and therefore their needs may never get fully articulated. The communist movement in India failed, I believe, to grasp the conceptual moves being made by the leadership led by Nehru to assimilate society into the ambit of the state.

From this failure a good deal of radical politics becomes clear. Why, for example, questions of culture or educational movements among the masses or social reforms directed towards the existing social institutions or even of entering into systematic dialogue with the existing popular consciousness or questions concerning women and gender got relegated as something of less than primary importance for the left movement. Or, we can ask, how was the relation between economic struggles and political and day-to-day life of the people conceived? Do all the assumptions and concepts by which people organise their experiences and through which they receive and respond to political messages lie within the intersection of politics and economics?

Sympathetic critics of the communist movement have often felt that the CPI has been insensitive to demands raised by dalits, women, etc. I think otherwise. I believe that the clue to the answer lies in understanding the implications of their failure to clearly grasp the strategy of the more radical sections of the political leadership of the ruling classes, articulated mainly by its left-wing led by Nehru; and, secondly, most of these movements took positions intermediate to the polar opposites posed by the Communist Party: are you for or against the overthrow of the state? And as such these were considered as reformist. The reverse of this failure has been to formulate the entire revolutionary strategy and the tactical lines with reference only to the state.

Involved here is the very conceptualisation of state-society relationship which in turn subsumes a number of assumptions about what power and structure and agency can reciprocally do to one another. Concretely, the real issue here is not that the CPI did not develop, as no doubt it did, its own charter of demands and evolved tasks for the cadre as critiques and counterpoises to the understanding as represented by the state. The point rather to note is that the way it did this was an instance of the inversion of what the state was doing. The struggles, agitations and propaganda conducted around the demands by the CPI or its mass-class organisations were decidedly important in raising the general awareness as well as in building pressure on the state to initiate moves for changes. But it did it, methodologically, in the way the state leadership was doing; that is, deducing demands from its perspective, however well thought out and theoretically defensible. Nevertheless, people still remained recipients of what flowed out of their agitational politics. The CPI could mobilise masses belonging to exploited classes and strata and was, and remains, good at giving them confidence when they followed it on its terms. But it could not enter into their world as it was or on their terms, and engage them in constant, open dialogue which could have been instrumental in bringing about attitudinal changes and altering value orientations. These could have, one may conjecture, created a ground on which to build an alternative hegemony through slow alterations in the consciousness of the masses. Activity centred around the formation of ideas and attitudes and their mode of articulation together with recognised forms of radical politics can perhaps provide another terrain for a hegemonic conquest.

The centrepiece of the politics of the CPI, pursued since independence to this day, has been, whatever be the major changes and variations in the strategy and tactics, to accept the state as the main reference for the counter-mobilisation of people. Depending on assessments, it could be taking the state head on or undermining it in terms of state *vs* anti-state forces. Translated in class terms it meant those forces who controlled the state and those who could be mobilised to fight for the alternative class coalition in the fight for the creation of a people's democratic state. What precisely are these class forces is a question to which answers have been changing not infrequently.

Equally damaging for long-term interest of left politics has been the tendency in the party to make periodic assessments of the nature of the Indian state simply based on the changing policies adopted by the government and on occasions the reflections and thoughts expressed by Nehru. In accordance with such periodic assessments there were corresponding adjustments in the party line. There also were readjustments in the inclusion or exclusion or change in emphasis about classes and social groups as potential allies in the united front.

By the time the party met for its Third Party Congress in Madurai (27 December 1953 to 4 January 1954) a vocal pro-Congress line had emerged within the leadership. Its first expressions were in the slowly growing appreciation on foreign policy positions. To begin with it was argued that there are 'progressive' features in the foreign policy but the internal policies have continued to be 'reactionary'. Responding to the growing debate and persistent questioning around this bifurcation of foreign policy as progressive and home policy as reactionary, the party in an explanatory note made the following observations:

> The foreign policy is to strengthen the position of ruling classes in India *vis-a-vis* the ruling classes of capitalist states and against the socialist states . . . and the internal policy is a matter of regulating relations between various classes in society and to strengthen the position of ruling classes against certain social forces.[31]

The party thus tried to disprove that there was any contradiction in viewing one as 'progressive' and the other as 'reactionary'. But then some began to argue that foreign policy could not be detached from the overall outlook of the ruling classes and that this change was bound to get reflected in the internal policies more and more with time.

Starting with India's changing stand on the Korean war and opposition to the MacArthur plans, Nehru's unequivocal stands on questions of war and peace and nuclear weapons and so on, visible change can be seen in the attitude to Nehru's government. This process got strengthened after the visit of Khrushchev soon followed by the visit of Zhou-en-Lai.[32] The humiliating defeat of the CPI in the Andhra elections also indirectly contributed to the process. Congress extensively distributed pamphlets of Khrushchev's speeches in the campaign whereas CPI kept on denouncing Nehru and his government as agents of imperialism and the collaborating bourgeoisie. The leadership in the party at various levels began questioning this pronounced divergence between the party's stand and that of the biggest socialist state.

Khrushchev not only praised Nehru as a state leader but also as a bearer of national development and remarked that it was a sapling which needed to be tended. Given all this, the CC of the party met in June 1955 and, reviewing the Andhra election results, noted, first, the failure of the party to forcefully place before the people the important part played by India in favour of world peace and Asian solidarity and, secondly, that this failure was utilised by the Congress to claim the entire credit.[33]

## PRO-CONGRESS TREND

Around this time an article by Modeste Rubinstein[34] appeared on the possibilities of non-capitalist path to socialism and that Nehru was pursuing such a path became a source of polemical exchanges in the party. As this pro-Congress trend became more and more vocal, the party, while noting some 'good features' in the economic development, especially the plan frame for the Second Five-Year Plan, rejected 'all speculations' about support to the Congress government. It noted that emphasis on heavy industry, state sector, relations of economic co-operation between India and USSR, steps to impose ceilings on landholding, etc. opened vast possibilities of economic development, but these did not lead to a new path which would take society towards socialism; they were welcome only to the extent that they would strengthen national independence. The chief weakness remained in the way resources were to be raised—at the cost of people—and utilised—for strengthening the ruling classes; this then was to be the criterion of assessment (Ghosh 1956a). And still the pro-Congress trend did not get silenced but became more persistent, citing the above developments as decisive. At this, the party, after long debates in the CC, set out the only permissible ground for collaborating with the Congress government. It was, to paraphrase in terms of criterial properties, something like this: (a) Only if a powerful reactionary party opposing the government had a chance of coming to power, then some sort of a general agreement with Congress would become necessary; (b) as there was no such chance now, to do so would be betrayal of the people and would sow confusion and disarm the people (Ghosh 1956b, 1956c).[35] As time went by and debate about the approaching second general elections (to be held in early 1957) built up in the party, it was reiterated that there was 'no possibility of a reactionary government replacing Congress' and therefore there was no need of modification in 'opposition to Congress'. Significantly, it went on to add that a big victory for Congress would be a 'victory of reaction'; the coming elections were therefore to be treated as struggle against Congress (Ghosh 1956d).

It is by now evident that the CC of CPI and the party activists were deeply divided and there was no unified understanding in the party about the stage of revolution or perspective, strategy and tactics—the necessary requirements for stable and uninterrupted revolutionary interventions in society. The general-secretary of the party (with the help of this or that section in the PB) was doing, it seems to me, a constant balancing act to hold the party together. By the time the party met for its Fourth Congress at Palghat (19–29 April 1956), the divisions had become open and visible and a split was feared. The pro-Congress or pro-government trend had by now become a majority trend in the CC and the PB. The Draft Political Resolution to be presented at the Party Congress talked of the need to co-operate with the Congress Party. As reasons for this, it highlighted that world capitalism was entering into its third general crisis, that everybody in the world was now talking of socialism and that political correlations were changing in its favour, it was possible now to build socialism with the help of the socialist camp and Soviet aid, and that the Indian state had made great progress, and so on. A counter-document—as an alternative Draft Political Resolution—was also presented to the CC by the trend opposed to co-operation with the Congress Party. This counter-draft was rejected in the CC by an overwhelming majority, but when it was presented to the Party Congress it was accepted by the delegates to the great embarrassment of the CC. Now, as an aside, my reading suggests to me that this counter-document was to become the ideological basis of the CPI(M). After the party congress, a large number of CC members deserted the document approved by the party congress and denounced the positions contained in it and produced a counter-proposal more pro-Congress in its tone than the original Draft Political Resolution; this counter-proposal, if my reading is correct, became the basis of the CPI position after the split. Somehow the split in the party, at that time, was averted through a compromise proposal by the party General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh. It was no doubt a hotch-potch compromise lacking in clarity and full of logical inconsistencies; the concepts it adopted like those of People's Democracy were not in tune with the reasoning adopted nor was the characterisation of the Indian state as one of bourgeois-landlords properly spelt out as it glaringly failed to identify the position in state power of the monopoly section of the bourgeoisie.

Three important changes need to be noted and a question asked about the method involved in arriving at these. First, by 1955 the entire party agreed that the 1951 programme of the CPI needed to be put in abeyance because many ideas were incorrect. There was also unanimous agreement that it should be revised. But how to go about it became contentious and differences never got resolved till the split in 1964 leading to the formation of CPI(M). For example, in June 1955 the CC of CPI met and in the resolution published immediately afterwards gave up some of the major formulations in the 1951 party programme. For instance, the characterisation that 'this government hanging on to the will of British commonwealth . . .' (para 10) and similar other statements were viewed as wrong or the assessment that the Government of India 'essentially carries on the foreign policy of British imperialism' (para 12) was taken as no longer true; and even the view about economic 'reconstruction' that it was 'all floundering, except such as feed war purposes' (para 7) was not found to be correct.[36] But the debate about the party programme continued. Further changes were made at the Party Congress in Palghat where it was stated that the programme 'missed some essential factors in the new situation'. These were the contradictions between the national bourgeoisie on the one hand and imperialism on the other; the role that the mass urge for consolidation and strengthening of national freedom and national economy could play; and above all, the vast and decisive significance of the emergence of socialism as a world system, its impact on the course of development in India were all missing in the party programme, 1951. So India was no more a 'satellite' state and the bourgeoisie which led it played a dual role as it sought relations with socialist countries.[37]

Second, by 1956 the party was debating the possibility of peaceful transitions to socialism. It noted that 'the possibility exists of effecting the transition to socialism peacefully without resort to civil war' (Ghosh 1956e, 1956f). By the time of the fifth party congress at Amritsar (13 April 1958), the new Draft Constitution proposed that

> The CPI strives to achieve full democracy and socialism by peaceful means. It considers that by developing a powerful mass movement, by winning a majority in the parliament and by backing it with mass sanctions, the working class and its allies can overcome the resistance of forces of reaction and ensure that parliament becomes an instrument of people's will for effecting fundamental changes in economic, social and state structure. (Ghosh 1958)

Third, the Indian bourgeoisie was no longer being considered as collaborationist. It was neither oppositional. But the party decided that it had a dual character (Ghosh 1955).[38] The bourgeoisie had serious contradictions with imperialism because it wanted independent industrialisation of India and therefore fought imperialism. But it was too weak and wanted imperialist help and aid and financial assistance and therefore also collaborated with it. But what remained a matter of dispute were the reasons behind the specific expressions of this dual character. Was it the whole bourgeoisie which was so or was it due to a split in its ranks and one section having gone over to imperialism and another in opposition to it? This was never resolved till the split in 1964 and was one of the crucial issues in the split of the party.

The question that needs to be asked, which we in the Communist Party have never asked, is: In the process of reassessment of the Indian state and the Nehru government was it Nehru who really changed so much between 1951 and 1955 or was it the change in the international communist movements in assessing India that allowed Nehru the margin for manoeuvre that he was looking for? The question is important because on how it is answered depends whether the communist movement in its self-assessments can escape superficial empiricism.

Anyway, the period ended without the CPI settling down on a stable basis of conducting its politics and, therefore, radical politics in India continued in a state of confusion and divisiveness till 1964. But, in spite of this, the CPI came to power in Kerala, the first time a Communist Party could do so in a multi-party competitive system anywhere in the world. Kerala became important also in an unthought-out way. To topple the Kerala government the secular Indian state took a license to mobilise and use a combination of the worst communal and casteist forces and used their apprehensions and fears and this in turn gave them a license to take freedom with the secular fabric of Indian politics. Indian politics could never again be the same.

The license for this kind of politics was first given by the tallest secularist that India has seen; Nehru declared the anti-Communist casteist—communal line up for the dismissal of the duly elected communist government in Kerala as a popular upsurge. This legitimised caste-communal mobilisations under secular leadership. Open caste-communal mobilisation not just to disrupt radical politics but simply to weaken political opposition has shown a steady ascendance since then. And this over time has shifted the balance of political contentions and electoral mobilisations more and more away from class and social or secular issues.

## DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF 'NON-HEGEMONIC CONQUEST' MODEL

For a critical understanding of the positions of the CPI, its successes and failure, it is important above everything else to get around the question of the state as the prime focus for centralising radical activity in society and directing it against existing power.

The position of the bourgeoisie and its characterisation, as I have tried to show, has been, and still remains, the bug for the communist movement in India. The programmatic differences between the CPI and CPI(M) and the various CPI(ML) factions—also popularly known as Naxalites—continue to centre around the determination of the character of the bourgeoisie and whom all it takes as its allies and how it combines them into a ruling class bloc and how it relates to international finance capital. The CPI differentiates between monopoly (big) bourgeoisie which seeks collaboration with imperialism and the national (non-big) bourgeoisie which opposes imperialism. The CPI(M), while conceding internal differentiations within bourgeoisie, rejects the notion of split and instead treats the whole of it as national in character but also insists that the entire bourgeoisie collaborates with as well as opposes imperialism. The CPI(ML) groups look at the bourgeoisie as no more than collaborators, that is, compradors, none of whom therefore can be relied upon to defend India's independence.[39]

Far more important than this, it seems to me, has been the failure of the communist movement to theoretically question the terrain that the state has been conquering for itself. On a conceptual scale of assimilating the society, the USSR before Gorbachev would represent the logical culmination of this process. Its anti-thesis can be the classical liberal state in England. India would be somewhere in between with all the fluctuations it has gone through. One result of this failure can be seen in the way the communist parties have contested and only contested the content and direction of the socio-economic transformative blueprint as it has evolved over the years. I do not intend to minimise the significance of this struggle. It has resulted in considerable gains for the ordinary people even if not allowing for a corresponding growth in the influence of the communist movement. But not being able to question the development of the state as the sole voice of the society and nation has blinded them from developing alternative forms of democracy—of democratic participation and questioning within the given parameters of social existence. These could have become, one can conjecture, the basis of a forward movement towards emancipatory mobilisations and the development of viable models for taking society to higher forms of democracy. As an aside, it remains an intriguing fact that though the communists have written so voluminously on the state, they still have to produce a comprehensive analysis of the social formation and based on this of the peculiar complexities of the national question in India as a whole although individual communists like Namboodiripad or Sundarayya have done so for specific regions.

I think that what made it difficult for the Communist Party to grasp and to analyse the implications of the conceptual moves being made by the Congress in general and its left under Nehru more incisively and to accept what was happening as *natural* was its uncritical acceptance of the post-Lenin-Stalinist model of the Soviet socialist state as the only valid model for socialist practice. The state controlled by revolutionary classes organised only under the Communist Party became the sole legitimate voice of everything in society. The construction of the revolutionary state, personifying the future as emancipation, was and remained till recently, the historical justification for the reflection of the voice of the unacceptable face of existing society. This, in essence, was simply an inversion of the Hegelian view of state as the transcendence of the evils of the autonomous society; something that Marx subjected to savage criticism. If in the classical liberal view the state embodying values which were of a universalising nature abstractly overcomes the evils of social life, here in socialist practice the same were simply silenced on the assumption that the provision of economic well-being, without exploitation, will take care of everything in life—an undialectical reduction of the relationships implied in the base-superstructure metaphor. In neither case was the society overcome in a radical way in a new awareness of human potentialities or practical consciousness.

The disastrous consequences of this, to digress, can now be seen in a pronounced way in eastern Europe and in a muted form in the erstwhile USSR. The re-emergence of the social voice in eastern Europe shows that little by which social life is lived has changed in 40 years of socialist economic transformation. In fact, one may even legitimately argue that there is more that is conservative and reactionary in what is getting articulated in eastern Europe than anywhere in the industrialised world. This is a clear instance of what I have in the beginning of this essay called non-hegemonic conquest.

The hold of this model on the thinking of communist parties and on the communist mind in general did not allow them to see the manoeuvres of the Indian state to subsume society within itself. Nor did it allow them to intervene in the day-to-day life of the people lived as it was in the inherited institutions and thus to transform outlook and develop alternative institutions. This has very wide-ranging results on how left politics related itself to radical movements, whether of the peasants or working classes or oppressed groups like scheduled castes or women or oppressed and exploited strata like tribals; but then this is another story which will have to be told in another way.[40]

## NOTES

1. I have dealt with these shifts in my article (Alam 1989). Based on my earlier analysis, I would like to add now that the JP Movement in its

consequences restricted the terrain of left politics and created the political space which allowed for a greater manoeuvre by the right-wing politics.

2. 'Political Thesis'(adopted at the Second Party Congress, 28 February to 6 March 1948), p. 116. All reference to party documents unless otherwise indicated are from 'Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India' (People's Publishing House, New Delhi).

3. Ibid., p. 117.

4. Ibid., p. 77.

5. 'What is Happening in Hyderabad' (CPI pamphlet, 30 January 1949), p. 3.

6. 'Review of the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India' (issued by the Politburo of the central committee of the Communist Party of India, March 1948), pp. 201–02.

7. Ibid., p. 202.

8. There is considerable literature on the Telangana partisan struggle but the above account is based on two documents and my prolonged discussions with some activists of the movements. The documents are:(i)'What Is Happening in Hyderabad', 30 January 1949, and (ii) 'Hyderabad's Battle for New Democracy Is Yours'(Hyderabad State Communist Committee, February 1948); in addition see also Sundarayya (1972); *Telangana: Awami Siasat Ka Dour* (in Urdu, Commemorative volume presented to Ravi Narayan Reddy, Hyderabad, 1983); Reddy (1984); Pavier (1981).

9. 'Political Thesis', p. 31.

10. Ibid., p. 15.

11. Ibid., p. 41.

12. Ibid.

13. 'Strategy and Tactics in the Struggle for People's Democratic Revolution in India' (Adopted by Politburo of CPI, December 1948), pp. 257–58.

14. From *Report on Reformist Deviation* (presented to the Second Congress of CPI), p. 148.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. Actually the beginning of the shift away from 'right-reformism' was the August 1946 CC Resolution. It saw for the first time the 'existence of the revolutionary upsurge' and gave a call to the cadre to lead the 'great strike battles' and be in the midst of peasant struggles all over. I hesitate to treat it as the turning point because even while recognising the compromising policies of the Congress and League leaders, this resolution had a clearly discernible tilt towards the oppositional role of the national bourgeois leadership.

17. *Report on Left Deviation Inside the CPI* (approved by the CC in June 1950), p. 753.

18. Ibid., p. 4.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. A *Note on the Present Situation in Our Party* (known when it was submitted as 'Three Ps' Document', the three Ps being Ajoy Ghosh (Prabodh Chandra), S. A. Dange (Prabhakar) and S. V. Ghate (Purushottam); submitted on 30 September 1950, under pseudonyms.

23. Works like Masani (1954); Kautsky (1956); Druhe (1959); Overstreet and Windmiller (1959); Sagar (1967) and Fie (1969) have shown a compelling urge to prove that the CPI had always been dictated and controlled from Moscow. Having studied the documents and other exchanges between CPI and CCCP and after having talked to many senior leaders of the communist movement in India, I believe that these works are tendentious in character. If one gets to their argument—couched so much in the cold war language—and looks at their evidence, one finds that they have been labouring to prove what needs no proving. None of the communist parties have ever made a secret of their fraternal relations of collaboration and advice. Some of this exchange has been open but a good deal was, for tactical reasons, never publicly acknowledged. In the same way a great deal of inner party debates and circulars have also not been made public. It is in the very nature of the revolutionary politics of communists, whether one approves of it or not, that not everything that goes on in it can be made public for press to discuss and the police to bust up the organisation. This politics is not transactional, like that of the Labour Party in England or the Democracts in America where everything can be traded off. It is a politics of the overthrow of the existing state and the destruction of ruling class power. Being made totally open will *ipso facto* destroy the objective of such politics.

What however can be critically looked at is why this exchange and advice became one-sided, so much so that it often undermined independent thinking and concrete analysis and how it led to acceptance of facile conclusions or irrelevant formulations. But this is a question of a different genre altogether which many communists themselves are pondering about. From the angle of a communist, see Namboodiripad (1987).

24. *The Programme of the CPI, 1951*, para 10.

25. Ibid., p. 18.

26. I owe a debt to Partha Chatterjee for first providing me with an insight on this question. The way I am using this or the implications I intend to draw are not quite the same as in his work, Chatterjee (1986).

27. Let me reproduce a few typical instances of Nehru's thinking on the state. He wrote:

> State violence is preferable to private violences in many ways, for one major violence is far better than numerous petty private violences.

> State violence is also likely to be more or less ordered violence and thus preferable to be disorderly violence of private groups and individuals for even in violence order is better than disorder (Nehru 1936: 552).

Much after India became free, Nehru as prime minister said that 'parliamentary democracy is inevitably going in the direction everywhere of what might be called economic democracy. It may take different forms but only in the measure that it solves the economic problems does it succeed even in the political field' (*Speeches II*, 25 February 1956, p. 142). And he added:

> . . . where there is adult suffrage there the question of trying to change thing by violence is absurd and wholly wrong (ibid.: p. 287).

28. A little before his death Gandhi spoke thus:

> Whatever the Congress decided will be done; nothing will be according to what I say, My writ runs no more. If it did, the tragedies in Punjab, Bihar, and Noakhali would not have happened. No one listens to me anymore. I am a small man. True, there was a time when mine was a big voice. Then everybody obeyed what I said; now neither the Congress nor the Hindus nor the Muslims listen to me. Where is the Congress going today? It is disintegrating. I am crying in the wilderness (*Collected Works*, vol. 87, p. 187, quoted in Chatterjee 1986).

29. See first quote in Note 27.

30. Nehru said: '. . . we have land legislation in a way so as not to throw the landlords to the wolves. That is we try to fit them into our future structure' (*Speeches III*, 13 December 1954).

31. Namboodiripad, 'The Character and Politics of the Nehru Government', *New Age* (political monthly), August 1955 All references are from the monthly.

32. The most important source for these debates and theoretical issues involved in them was the *New Age* (political monthly). Every issue in its editorial comments and Questions and Answer Section debated all the issues involved. In addition, there are important contributions from PB members on important matters. Slow variations and subtle reversals can be detected in pursuing these.

33. 'Editorial Comment', *New Age*, June 1955.

34. 'A Non-Capitalist Path for Underdeveloped Countries' reproduced in *New Age*, October 1958 as an Appendix. Ajay Ghosh, general secretary of CPI, wrote a rejoinder: 'On India's Path of Development' in the same issue, pp. 4–12.

35. The criteria for assessing Congress performances laid down as first, 'what are the needs of the situation and what are the possibilities' and, secondly, 'what could and should therefore have to be done and what was

actually'. On these criteria the basic contradictions and therefore struggles and requirement and possibilities get ignored.

36. This was summed up by Ghosh (1961, 1955).

37. Ghosh (1961), and 'Political Resolution' (draft) fourth party congress, Palghat, 19–29 April 1956.

38. My readings in the party's development suggest to me that, theoretically, to understand the complexity of the question of characterising the bourgeoisie, this is the most important contribution. Also, it is more important than anything else about the key issue in the split of the party in 1964.

39. Mohan Ram (1969) refers to this as 'Maoism Returns'.

40. There are many works on the communist movement in India from different ideological perspectives. But within this large presence there is a significant absence. There is as yet no official history of the communist movement from the CPI; none by the united party before 1964 or after 1964 till now by the CPI(M) or the CPI or any of the CPI(ML) factions organised under different CCs. The absence of an official history, I think, is largely due to one reason. An official history needs theorisation of defeats as well as successes, but more so of defeats in the way Lenin did with the 1905 Revolution. Take Telangana, for instance, there are half a dozen different interpretations from within the communist movement itself. Like with Telangana, on most other problems there has been a failure to achieve a unified understanding. It may legitimately be argued that before 1964 the inner party differences were so sharp that no acceptable account evaluating the past, its achievements and failures, strengths and weaknesses could have been attempted. But it is worth noting that after the 1964 split when ideologically more unified organisations—CPI(M) and CPI—became stabilised even then from their respective ideological positions and political understanding no history has come out, not even of the split in the party.

As such there is no reference frame in terms of which the assertions made or inferences drawn or positions taken or general conclusions reached in this study can be compared. I have in this work decided to work only through the documents and as such I had to sift and choose documents as seemed important to me and to this extent an element of subjectivity may have crept in. Beyond this, I hope, I have not allowed my political preferences to get into the analysis.

I would like to make one point about why I have not relied upon existing works, some of which have been cited in Note 23 and a few of which are no doubt, scholarly works. I have one major reservation about their more general conclusion. That conclusion is that it always has been Moscow (and CCCP), for the period we are examining, which had called the shots and the CPI in a servile way followed instructions. Let me elaborate my reservation a little bit.

If the party under P. C. Joshi from mid-1930s on to late 1946 carried on the line as dictated by Moscow, then when Moscow wanted a militant—'adventurist— line from 1947–48 why did Joshi resist the line during this period to the point where he invited his expulsion from the party. Logically, if Joshi was the Moscow man as it is alleged, he should have gone along with the new reading of the situation from Moscow. It remains inexplicable to me as to why he chose to resist Moscow. Again, if Ranadive became the Moscow boy in 1947–48, then why did he continue to take the anti-Congress line in the period leading to the Fourth Party Congress at Palghat or the Fifth Congress at Amritsar? Why did Moscow withdraw support to him in less than 18 months? What was the Rajeshwara Rao interregnum supposed to represent? Why does one person pro-Moscow not resist the new Moscow line in another period? The framework adopted in these works avoids these inconvenient questions; and these, I think, are vital to establish the validity of their framework.

What seems to me crucial in the making of CPI politics—which has decidedly not been transactional politics—is that competing ideological tendencies, with shifts in the positions of spokesmen now and then, always existed and were important in how the party related itself to the world communist movement—no doubt headed by Moscow. All the communist parties accepted being part of the world communist movement and accepted Moscow's leadership. In the way this came about after 1920s, it is possible to argue that given the implicit hierarchical ordering of relationship in the world communist movement together with the self-imposed necessity of defence—even if this necessity of defence was not critically conceptualised, it was well in order—of the only socialist state till after the Second World War, the communist parties allowed critical evaluations and independence in 'fraternal relations' to decline by default. Communist parties as such did not become servile although individuals in them may have been so. But nevertheless the communist parties lost that critical vitality which was so integral a feature of fraternal relations among them during the Second International and the early phase of the Third International. This is, I believe, the key to unravel how politics got shaped within the communist parties in different countries, India being no exception.

Ideological tendencies being far more crystallised within the CPI, however much their individual spokesmen were shifting from one position to another, there was ascendance or descendance of these tendencies as and when Moscow started picturing the world differently at critical junctures and that is how 'party lines' saw their life span abruptly terminated. I do not think that conventional factional models of understanding politics will be of much help either in grasping the bewildering nature of changes in fortunes of lines (and leaders) at particular periods of revolutionary politics. What can, I think, give a further clue was the dialectical tendency in the Soviet Communist Party under Stalin of absolutisation of political trends and then presenting these to others as the right reading of the world situation. We can explicate this by taking an instance. For example, if the 'bourgeoisie' under KMT breaks the United Front and butchers the communists in China, then it would so happen that this will be read as the propensity of bourgeoisie all over the colonies (or akin situations); in fact this should rather have been seen as a specificity grounded within a context. Not doing so was, I believe, disastrous for the communist parties to evolve lines based on closer scrutiny of specific social formations. Examples can be multiplied but suffice it to point out here that this tendency to absolutisation got engrained in the world communist movement.

Let me round off this discussion of my reservations about existing literature on the CPI by looking at another extension of their main conclusions. It can also often be found in such writings that once the split in the world communist movement became open, it has been seen as a decisive influence on the behaviour of groups within the CPI. I do not intend to discount the very great importance of the split on the ideological debates in the CPI. But what has not been done is to delineate the critical limits of the influence of this development. Failure to do so has led to over-generalisations through an over-reading of its significance for the debates in the party leading ultimately to the break-up of the CPI. Let us therefore recapitulate, as set out in details in the body of this paper, a part of the history of debates in the CPI concerning attitude to be adopted to the Congress government. The pro-Congress and anti-Congress trends in the party are as old as the period following the Third Party Congress at Madurai and these trends had crystalised by the time the party met for the Fourth Party Congress at Palghat in 1956. This was represented by two (Draft) Political Resolutions at the party Congress. These lines became, more or less, CPI and CPI(M) later and based on these resolutions and understanding contained within them two programmes and two political resolutions were passed at the Sixth Party Congress in Vijayawada. What is important is that at the time of the Palghat Congress no one had an inkling of the Sino-Soviet split. The anti-Congress trend which formally became CPI(M) in 1964 was *de facto* a separate party at the Vijayawada Congress and was clearly recognisable even at the Palghat Congress; and yet it was called pro-Chinese even though China had not approved the draft of the programme which was to become the basis of CPI(M) in 1964 and by 1967 the whole of the CPI(M) was being denounced by China.

I therefore would call these modes of interpretations about debates and differences in the CPI as 'stretched inferences' conditioned by cold war as much as many strategic military calculations were.

# PART III

# COMMUNITY, CITIZENSHIP AND CONFLICT

CHAPTER 9

# The Crisis of Hindu Nationalism in Post-Partition India, 1947–52

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay*

## INTRODUCTION

The All India Hindu Mahasabha since its revival in the 1920s, tried to position itself against its projected 'threatening Others', the Muslims (Jaffrelot 1993: 25–26). In the 1940s when the Pakistan movement began to acquire momentum, it championed the cause of *Akhand Hindusthan* (united India). But when Congress agreed to partition Punjab and there was a distinct possibility of the whole of Bengal going over to the proposed East Pakistan, the Mahasabha launched a political campaign for the partition of Bengal. Yet when freedom arrived with Partition on 15 August 1947, the Mahasabha decided to boycott the celebrations as a protest against Partition. This obviously confused many of its followers. And then, after Independence, the Hindu Mahasabha had to identify its new 'Other', as the Muslims were no longer 'threatening' in a post-Partition India, where the Hindus were now an overwhelming majority, about 87 per cent. In August 1947, Dr Shyama Prasad Mookherji therefore warned his partymen that:

> there can be no reason for maintaining a separate political organisation confined to Hindus as such after attainment of India's Independence.

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> We are today masters of our own destiny and we can shape State policy and administration in any way we like, acceptable to the majority of the people or their representatives.[1]

But many in his party did not share his democratic optimism. In view of these dilemmas and pluralism within its own ranks, the Hindu Mahasabha needed to redefine its ideological position.

So on 28 December 1947, the Working Committee of the Mahasabha decided to initiate an internal debate to 'reorient' its ideological position. A Special Committee was to be appointed to collect and collate opinion on an internal discussion document on the 'reorientation of the Mahasabha policy and programme . . . in the light of the altered circumstances of the country'.[2] In the end the debate did not result in any major reorientation of the Mahasabha policies, as the old guards staunchly held the ground, and the debate was somewhat derailed by the political fallout of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, which in the end consolidated the position of the conservatives within the party. No historian of Hindu nationalism has ever looked at this debate closely and critically, although it raised several serious questions about political modernity and citizenship of the emergent Indian nation. It also clearly brings out the pluralism within a major Hindu nationalist group and shows that the Hindu right was never a political monolith. But more importantly, it indicated an alternative historical possibility that was never realised.

## THE DOCUMENT

First, let us discuss the document or the circular that the Working Committee of the Mahasabha sent out to its members for feedback. It pointed out, first of all, that during the British period there was a broad functional anti-imperialist consensus to get rid of the British, but no ideological consensus on which 'the edifice of Free India . . . [was] to be erected'. It reiterated its faith in the 'Hindu rashtra', but did not project it as a concept of a communal or theocratic state. It argued that the basic aspects of Hindu rashtra as defined in Mahasabha's Bilaspur Resolution (1944)—for example, 'joint electorate, adult franchise, no weightage to minorities and representation on population basis'—had all been recognised and secured by the Constituent Assembly. But was it a 'complete conception of Hindu Rashtra' or did it require 'a far more precise and comprehensive definition'?

This question was particularly important, the circular stated, as Congress was defining the future of the Indian nation according to the Western model of a 'democratic secular state'. Interrogating this preferred model of modernity, where religion would be separated from politics and relegated to the private sphere of the individual, the circular raised several questions:

> Will a secular democratic state adequately satisfy the aspiration of the Indian masses? Will the new Free State of India solely concern itself with the material happiness and prosperity of the people or will it endeavour to develop the spiritual urge of her people and to subordinate their purely material interests to considerations of higher culture and spiritual revolution?
>
> Has democracy, as it has worked in Western countries, really brought about peace and prosperity of her people? . . . will Free India blindly imitate the West in this respect or will India forge ahead on the lines of her innate political genius?[3]

Apart from this ideological orientation, the structural realities of the new nation also had to be taken into account, and the most important issue was 'the place of Moslems in Hindu Rashtra'. As many Muslims preferred to live in India, what would be the effects of communal demography on the political future of the Hindus in the new regime of joint electorate? And should Muslims be admitted into the Hindu Mahasabha and should it now be opened to members of other religions?

This document immediately evoked from its members mixed responses, which were informed by varied notions of history, and indicated different levels of engagement with modernity. On one side of the spectrum were those who would not allow any change to the structure and ideology of the party. But on the other, there were those who embraced a wider civilisational concept of nation, almost akin to what Mahatma Gandhi had advocated in his *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Their agendas were closer to those of the 'Hindu traditionalists' within the Congress, who believed in the Indian nation, but also in the strengthening of the culture and interests of the majority community (Jaffrelot 1993: 83–84). These reformists were keen to craft an Indian modernity which would be their own, where the state would be defined spiritually rather than in Western secular legalistic terms, but it would be inclusive at the same time. As Shyama Prasad Mookherji put it in one of his speeches: 'I hate the word secular;—in the dictionary it is defined as "Godless, profane", we claim to be a civilised democratic State, where people will have equal rights no matter what their religion is. . . .'[4] In the opinion of these people, in this moral-spiritual definition of state the Hindu Mahasabha could define its own distinctive ideological position vis-à-vis the secular modernism of the Congress that was perceived to be imitative of the West.

However, while all of them rejected the Congress's idea of a secular state, its alternative, the 'Hindu rashtra' had different meanings to different people. To some it implied a spiritual concept of state, which was universalistic. For them 'Hindu' was the name of a civilisational nation, which included other religious groups too. But there were others who preferred a communitarian definition of Hindu rashtra. For them the Hindus as a majority community had the legitimate right to dominate the nation-state, in which other minority communities were suspects. And of all the minorities, the Muslims were particularly unacceptable, because of a widely shared historic sense of betrayal. And as these communitarian ideas began to take firmer roots, the reformists who believed in universalism, found their space more and more constricted. This tension reached a crisis point when the Mahasabha received its severest political blow at the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948.

## THE CRISIS

The government believed that the assassination was the result of a conspiracy involving the Mahasabha and the RSS.[5] The public outrage that followed led to a severe clamp down on both these two groups by the Government of India. Apart from the state control, there was a huge popular backlash against the Hindu right-wing organisations and their leaders. The RSS was formally banned; the Mahasabha escaped the ban, but the public backlash made some of its leaders think deeply about its future. Mookherji argued that the Mahasabha now had two options: either it could wind up its political career and focus on welfare and philanthropic activities, or it could shed its communal character and throw its door open to people of all religions (Graham 1990: 13). He argued in a press statement:

> In the India of today, more than 85% of her people are Hindus and if they are unable to protect their own economic and political interests or India's inherent rights through the working of a fully Democratic constitution, no separate political party, which would confine its membership to the Hindu fold alone, could ever save Hindus or their country.
>
> On the other hand, if the majority community itself retains its political exclusiveness it would inevitably encourage the growth of communal political organizations representing the interests of various minority groups within the country itself, leading to highly prejudicial results.[6]

On Mookherji's recommendation the Central Working Committee of the Mahasabha which met in Delhi on 14–15 February resolved to 'suspend its political activities and to concentrate on real Sangathan work . . . for the creation of a powerful and well organised Hindu society in Independent India' (Graham 1990: 13).

But this was not a very popular decision and indeed precipitated a crisis for the organisation, as the conservatives reacted sharply to what appeared to them an unnecessary knee-jerk response. Leaders like Ashutosh Lahiry, B. S. Moonje, B. G. Khaparde were deeply unhappy. And frustrated radicals from villages and district towns and representatives of Hindu student bodies began to write to the General Secretary protesting against such a cowardly measure following the 'killing of a friend of Pakistan', their language clearly expressing their Brahmanical and masculinist anxieties.[7] Indeed so powerful was the groundswell of protest that the Working Committee of the Mahasabha ultimately gave in to the pressure and decided in a meeting on 8 August 1948 to reverse its February decision and resume its political activities.[8] However, the meeting, participated by Mookherji as well, could not ignore the new political realities around them. As a conciliatory gesture towards the reformists, the 'Political Resolution' adopted at the meeting envisaged the 'development of a strong democratic State in the country' and to achieve this objective it recommended that the All-India committee should forthwith 'consider amongst other things whether the membership of the Hindu Mahasabha should not be thrown open to all citizens irrespective of caste or religion'. It also recommended immediate resumption of the initiative to institute a Reorientation Committee to suggest changes to Mahasabha policies and programmes.[9] Within the next three days a committee was formed and its membership was publicly announced and the debate was underway.

## THE DEBATE

As the debate progressed within the Hindu Mahasabha circles, two opposing views on citizenship of the Indian nation, and consequently on the membership of the Mahasabha emerged. And it is difficult to fit any of these ideas neatly into any of the conventional definitions of citizenship such as 'civic/liberal', 'democratic/republican' or 'ethno-national'—which Ornit Shani and Joya Chatterji have recently discussed in relation to postcolonial India (Shani 2010: 151). One group wanted to redefine the term 'Hindu' by emptying it of its religious connotation, and making it simultaneously a geographical as well as civilisational concept. All those who called Hindusthan their motherland would be considered as Hindus and could become members of the Mahasabha. On the other hand, the conservatives wanted to stick to the existing religious and exclusive 'ethno-religious' definition of Hindu, as was once defined by Veer Savarkar, and as a concession to the new realities of free India would perhaps accept non-Hindus only as 'associate members' of the Mahasabha.[10]

This ideological rift over the nature of Indian modernity and citizenship ripped open the divisions within the Mahasabha leadership. On one side of this fault line, as Ashutosh Lahiry explained in a personal letter to one of his supporters, were the reformists, who included '[m]ost of our Maharashtrian leaders', believing in Western-type democracy and through it wanting to establish the dominance of the Hindus, and according to them, this had already been accomplished with the independence and Partition, and hence the demand for transforming the Mahasabha into a non-communal organisation. But '[s]ome of us', wrote Lahiry, 'have not been able to see eye to eye with this fundamental approach to the problem'. They felt that a democratic tradition in India could only be developed slowly, and hence the 'spiritual and cultural heritage of India must be the sheet-anchor' of the future Indian state.[11]

It was indeed the most divisive internal debate that the Mahasabha possibly ever experienced in its history. The Reorientation Committee met on 18, 19 and 20 September 1948; in all it had four sittings and deliberated for 13 to 14 hours, but in the end failed to produce a consensus. The main resolution which recommended that 'the Hindu Mahasabha should carry on its political activities without admitting any non-Hindus thereto' was supported by seven members of the committee, while three members—S. R. Date, K. H. Dhamdhere and R. A. Kanitkar—voted against it.[12] In a 'Minute of Dissent' the three dissident members recorded their sense of disappointment in no uncertain terms: 'Our dissent basically relates to the necessity of opening the Hindu Mahasabha to other nationals, which according to us is inevitable in the new set up, so as to enable it to function as an effective political organisation.'[13]

At the next meeting of the Working Committee which sat in Delhi on 6 and 7 November 1948 the conclusion was however foregone, as the conservatives dominated the committee. But even then, the resolution could not be passed unanimously. Debendranath Mukherjee, a known Shyama Prasad loyalist, voted against the resolution.[14] The new draft constitution of the party, which was approved by the Mahasabha Working Committee, defined the 'Hindu' as 'a person who declares that he is a Hindu and regards this land of Bharatvarsha . . . as his Father-land as well as his Holyland'. And within that definition it decided to 'carry on its political activities without admitting any non-Hindu thereto'.[15]

The decision of the Working Committee laid bare the ideological rift within the Mahasabha very sharply and it now began to threaten the very existence of the organisation. The ascendancy of the communitarian ideas within the Mahasabha further constricted the space for the reformists who wanted to forge a broad-based democratic political opposition to the Congress. Shyama Prasad Mookherji resigned from the Working Committee on 23 November, and from the Mahasabha in December 1948; his resignation was accepted on 7 May 1949 (Baxter 1969: 27; Graham 1990: 13). Later in October

1951 he formed his own party, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. However, there were other disgruntled members of the Mahasabha who did not resign immediately and continued their struggle from within; let me now turn to them.

## THE NEW PROGRAMME

In June 1949 a new programme of the Mahasabha was issued through a document entitled 'Mahasabha's New Stand'. It pointed out categorically that there would be 'no departure, whatsoever, from our ideal of Hindu Rashtra'. '[W]e call it Hindu Rashtra', the document said, 'because the word "Indian" is foreign to us'. Any 'blind imitation' of Western democracy 'can never inspire the masses, nor can it lead our land to its desired destiny', only the ideal of Hindu rashtra can.[16] At a press conference in Calcutta on 4 November 1949, Ashutosh Lahiry as the General Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha provided a further clarification of its new anti-secular ideology. Hinduism today, he observed, was like 'a federal system of diverse faiths', and therefore in the Hindu rashtra every religion will have its right. But everyone will have to align with the cultural notion of Hindu rashtra, going back to 'ancient moorings'; it involved 'the work of nationalising the four crores of our Muslim brethren'.[17]

At the Calcutta session of the Mahasabha held on 24–26 December 1949 the new programme was confirmed. It was in this conference that the party also changed its name from All India Hindu Mahasabha to 'Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha',[18] to make it look more indigenous. However, the question of the Indian Muslims continued to trouble the Mahasabha ideologues for some more time as the small group of reformists had not given up their battle against the communitarian ideology of Hindu rashtra. In December 1950 they tried to amend the official resolution on non-Hindus at the Poona session of the Working Committee, which was to endorse the principles adopted at the Calcutta session. First of all, an amendment to the official resolution was unsuccessfully moved by Professor Om Prakash Kahol of Punjab. It pointed out that the non-Hindu minorities, 'who have completely identified their interests with the Nation', needed to be assured 'equal opportunities'.[19] While this amendment did not go anywhere, another proposed resolution from Govindrao Desai of Poona mentioned 'the urgent need of having a strong party in opposition to the party in power'. And for that reason it suggested that:

> the Hindu Mahasabha should take a bold step to convert itself into a *Hindi* Mahasabha (i.e., an assembly of all Indians) to make it possible for all irrespective of religion and community to become its members to secure the common object of having a strong and influential opposition to the congress.[20]

A third 'Alternative Resolution' proposed to rally 'all nationalist and democratic elements' to form a new party as a parliamentary opposition—a new party that would be 'open to all irrespective of caste, colour and creed . . . [and be] broad-based upon the principles of democracy and nationalism'. However, none of these draft resolutions could make their way to the main session. The reformists now seemed to have almost lost their battle.

Almost, because as a partial concession to them, in his Presidential address, Dr N. B. Khare assured the non-Hindus that 'no disability whatsoever shall attach to them' in the Hindu rashtra.[21] The official resolution 'recognise[d] that the various non-Hindu minorities in India have got large stakes in the country', but they could be allowed entry into the Mahasabha only 'in so far as the Parliamentary part of its activities is concerned'.[22] Four months later on 28 April 1951 a special session of the Mahasabha in Jaipur endorsed this principle. The resolution invited the 'Indian Muslims to rally under the banner of the Mahasabha to build up a Hindu rashtra in which their interests would be fully safeguarded'. In other words, in Mahasabha's ideological parlance, citizenship in India was going to be based not on the Western concept of secular individual citizenship; it was going to be defined culturally by its notions of Hindutva. The Muslims had to accept that ideology to become full citizens.

## THE REFORMISTS

As All-India Hindu Mahasabha (AIHM) was turning itself into an exclusive communitarian organisation, Shyama Prasad Mookherji was thinking of launching a new political party of his own. The discussion to start the new Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Party) was initiated in April, and its West Bengal branch was launched on 9 June 1951.[23] In his Presidential address in Calcutta, Mookherji described it as a democratic opposition party designed to stop the 'one party rule' by Congress, which was clearly showing 'totalitarian' tendencies, and for that it was prepared to collaborate with other like-minded political parties and groups. As for its membership, his announcement reiterated his belief in the spiritual definition of Indian nationhood and a recognition of its innate pluralism:

> Our party is open to all citizens of India irrespective of caste, creed or community. It will be the bounden duty of the majority community to allay all fears in the minds of the minorities and help them to exercise their equal rights of citizenship. At the same time we do not make a fetish of so-called secularism. Who are communalists? Not surely those, who did not want India to be divided on a communal basis. . . . We want to build up that India which from time immemorial has been the home of diverse creeds, faiths and religions which accepted India as their common motherland and imbibed her great culture and heritage. We want to see the rebirth of that glorious culture of Bharat. This culture is not narrow or sectarian. It is all-embracing and represents the eternal spirit of universal brotherhood.[24]

However, side by side with this recognition of Indian pluralism, Mookherji also repeated his old complaint against Congress appeasement of Pakistan, and demanded a reversal of history through annulment of Partition and reunification of Bharat.[25]

The Jana Sangh as an all-India party was formally launched at a conference in Delhi on 21 October 1951, where Mookherji was elected its president. In his presidential address he refuted the charge that it was a communal party, and repeated once again that while the party considered it dangerous to appease minority identities anchored in caste and religion, it also felt that the majority had a responsibility to provide protection to such groups.[26] In other words, the new party would adhere to the Western concepts of individual citizenship and modernity, without losing its moorings in India's pluralist cultural past. Politically, Mookherji saw the new party as a modern 'national party' that might offer an 'effective alternative' to Congress—an opposition party without which democracy might degenerate first into one-party rule and then into one-man rule. However, this modernity was to be rooted in India's own cultural traditions. His economic programme therefore was grounded in 'faith and conviction in Bharatiya culture' and not on any of the 'imported cargo of "isms"'. 'Let it be recognised', Mookherji wrote, 'that capitalism, socialism and communism in between themselves do not exhaust the possibilities of economic organisation. There are more truths in our ancient institutions and ideas than we in our vanity would concede' (Mookerji 1951: ii, iv–v). The General Secretary of the party, Deendayal Upadhyay, further reiterated the indigenousness of his party's position: 'We should take the view that the politics of India had been molded on foreign ideas to the neglect of Indian tradition, culture and heritage. Hence, the need of a party deriving its basic inspiration from within' (Jhangiani 1967: 9). Its manifesto talked about 'One Country', 'One Nation' and 'One Culture'. If these sounded like the fundamentals of a modern nation-state, it was presented in a language of indigeneity: the party would strive to establish 'Dharma Rajya', defined as 'Rule of Law, wherein men and women of various faiths, speaking different languages and residing in different parts of the country will live in an atmosphere of unity, freedom and goodwill, pursuing and furthering a common culture and serving a common motherland to achieve the Bharatiya ideal of progress, spiritual and national' (Bharatiya Jana Sangh 1973, I: 48–49).

Such overt attempts by the leaders of the Jana Sangh to indigenise modernity also overshadowed the universalism of their concept of citizenship. The new party, which was joined by some of the members of the Mahasabha, representing the more reformist views within its ideological spectrum, appeared in public perception more like a reformed version of the Mahasabha. Other than keeping the door technically ajar for the non-Hindus, the Jana Sangh could offer hardly anything distinctively new or innovative in terms of political programme that could distinguish it from the Mahasabha. M. R. Jayakar, who was then the Vice Chancellor of Poona University, warned Mookherji that his Draft Manifesto needed to be carefully revised 'in order to lessen the resemblance of your programme with that of the Hindu Mahasabha'. As it stood, it gave the impression that his party was 'only another form of the Hindu Mahasabha, more carefully planned and disguised'.[27]

Also in functional terms Mookherji could not move beyond the usual high-caste Hindu constituency that historically provided the support base for Hindu nationalism. Continuously castigated by the Congress as 'communal', he also found his manoeuvring space progressively squeezed. The list of representatives who were invited to the Calcutta launch of the West Bengal party, although it included a few prominent Scheduled Caste leaders, did not include a single Muslim name.[28] And as for the all-India party, his supporters were mostly the feudal chiefs—the rajas and maharajas of the erstwhile Princely States.[29] And this made him dependent on the RSS for a support base and for volunteers. Mookherji, who had castigated the Hindu Mahasabha as 'communal' for adopting the goal of Hindu rashtra, had to eat his words and acknowledge a mistake to assuage M. S. Golwalkar, the RSS supremo, to solicit his support (Graham 1990: 26). Because of RSS he thought had an efficient and disciplined organisation, which could provide him with the support base which he lacked. But he tried hard not to compromise his universalist ideal. In his presidential address at the annual function of the RSS in New Delhi on 3 December 1950 he had advocated the need for a Hindu revival, but also reminded his audience that: 'As a land of peoples following diverse faiths and religions, maintenance of good understanding amongst all such classes, based on one common nationhood and a common Bharatiya culture is also a vital necessity.'[30] As long as he was alive he tried to maintain the open democratic nature of the Jana Sangh. As B. D. Graham mentions, 'Mookerjee had shown that it was possible to make use of RSS support while retaining freedom of manoeuvre and that adherence to Hindu traditions did not exclude parallel appeals to liberal principles.' It was only after his death in 1953 that the party actually came to be dominated by the RSS (Graham 1990: 54 and *passim*).

As the general election of 1952 approached, the Jana Sangh announced its Election Manifesto, which once again contained no surprises. To solve food problems, it proposed cultivation of wasteland, advocated abolition of zamindari *with* compensation, and recommended rapid industrialisation to make the country self-sufficient.[31] It decided to focus on two issues—Kashmir and the East Bengali refugees—for its immediate political campaign. In West Bengal Mookherji found it difficult to get sufficient number of willing candidates and volunteers who would be prepared to work for his party or accept his party nominations.[32] But nevertheless, he launched a vigorous election campaign and extensively toured the countryside.[33] Here he assiduously cultivated the friendship of the Muslims. At an election rally in Kharagpur, he assured the Muslims of safety, and denying the charge that he was 'communal', he submitted: 'My only fault is that I stand dauntlessly for the cause of the Hindus in East Bengal.'[34] But it was hardly an issue that could win him an election, as citizens of India had a plethora of other problems, which they expected their political leaders to address. As a result, while the party made its presence felt to some extent in north and central India, it could not get a foothold in Mookherji's own province, West Bengal.[35]

## Conclusion

So how do we conclude this story of the Hindu right wing's political crisis in the wake of decolonisation? The first general election of 1952 spelled disaster for all Hindu nationalist parties. The way the internal ideological debate within the AIHM concluded by 1951 with the defeat of the reformists, it appeared in public perception that it was merely a narrow right-wing communal party of the conservative Hindus. While its leadership still remained hopelessly divided, its election manifesto with the promise of 'establishing Hindu Raj in Bharat'[36] did not resonate well with the new citizens of India. This overt tone of Hindu nationalism made it an easy target of Congress attack. Nehru and Congress, with its massive resources, launched a robust campaign in this election. Nehru travelled in all 25,000 miles during this campaign and addressed election meetings in every nook and corner of the country. And everywhere he attacked communalism and the communalists as major enemies of the nation (Guha 2007: 139). The Jana Sangh could not distinguish itself from the Mahasabha, and as a result, in this election the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jana Sangh and the Ram Rajya Parishad (another small Hindu nationalist party) competed with each other and with the Congress for votes. They knew very well though that without a united opposition it was impossible to stop the Congress electoral juggernaut.[37]

The result of the election of 1952, based for the first time on universal adult franchise, was a complete rout for the Hindu right-wing parties. In the central parliament, the Jana Sangh got three seats against Hindu Mahasabha's four. The latter's predicament was even more pitiable, as the party was almost completely wiped out in this election. In the central parliament, the AIHM got only four seats;

and in the state assemblies in the whole of India it got only 20 seats, its largest representation being in Madhya Bharat with 11 seats. In the central parliament, the Mahasabha got 0.95 per cent of votes, and in the state assemblies 0.82 per cent. The Mahasabha could never recover from this set back or re-position itself within the new political realities of independent India. Its inability to change resulted in its gradual disappearance as a national political party.

The Hindu right-wing politics from now on became the domain of the Jana Sangh, which represented the more modernist elements within the right, although it could not fully distinguish itself from the Mahasabha and after Dr Shyama Prasad Mookherji's death in 1953 came more under the tutelage of the RSS. However, as S. R. Date, one of the three dissidents of the 1949–50 debate, later recalled in an oral interview in 1970, if the reorientation debate had been resolved in favour of the reformists, the trajectory of Hindu nationalist politics in India might have been different.[38] Although that counterfactual history remains outside the purview of the present essay, it shows nevertheless an alternative possibility that arose in the wake of decolonisation, indicating that the Hindu right in India was not a political monolith. There was a strong dissident voice which offered a different model of modernity that recognised a legitimate space for religion in the public life of the nation, but did not accept the exclusivist communitarian ideology of Hindu rashtra. But these modernists were gradually squeezed out of political existence as the conservatives took control of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress portrayed everyone on the right as communalists.

## Notes

1. 'Dr. S. P. Mukerjee's statement', *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (I Installment), Speeches/Statements, Sl. No. 6, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). Also see Graham (1990: 12–13).

2. A copy of the circular can be found in Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No. C-175/1948-49, pp. 195–97, NMML.

3. Circular of All India Hindu Mahasabha, New Delhi, dated 23 December 1947, issued by Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary, GB, IB Records, S.No. 35/1923, F.No. 254/23, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

4. *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (I Installment), Speeches/Statements by S. P. Mookherji, S.No. 31, NMML.

5. 'Brief History of Shri Ashutosh Lahiry', GB, IB Records, S.No.45/1920, F.No.210/20, WBSA.

6. Mookherji's press statement, 23 November 1948, *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (I Installment), Speeches/Statements, Sl. No. 6, NMML.

7. Twenty-eight crores of Hindu Brothers and Sisters to General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha. 9 February 1948, intercepted letter, GB, IB Records, S.No.35/1923, F.No.254/23; Dewan Dwarka Khosla, Working President, All India Hindu Students Federation to Ashutosh Lahiry, 28 August 1950, intercepted letter, GB, IB Records, S.No.8/1920, F.No.210/20 (1), Part II, WBSA.

8. *The Statesman*, 9 August 1948.

9. Proceedings of the meeting of the Working Committee of the All India Hindu Mahasabha held on 7 and 8 August 1948, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-175/1948-49, NMML.

10. *The Statesman*, 11 September 1948.

11. Ashutosh Lahiry to Ramendranath Ghosh, 19 April 1949, intercepted letter, GB, IB Records, S.No. 158/20, F.No. 210/20, WBSA.

12. Report of the Reorientation Committee, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-175/1948–49; also see Ashutosh Lahiry's press statement in Ashutosh Lahiry Papers, Speeches/statements by him, Sl.No. 10, NMML.

13. 'Minute of Dissent', Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-175/1948–49, NMML

14. Proceedings of the Working Committee Meeting held at New Delhi on the 6 and 7 November 1948, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-175/1948-49, NMML.

15. All India Hindu Mahasabha, *New Political & Economic Programme*, New Delhi, 1948, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers, Pamphlets, S.No. 29, NMML.

16. *Mahasabha's New Stand*, New Delhi, June, 1949, pp. 5–6, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers, Pamphlets, S.No. 31, NMML.

17. See the transcript of the press conference in GB, IB Records, S.No.35/1920, F.No. 210/20 (1), WBSA.

18. 'History sheet of Shri Ashutosh Lahiry', GB, IB Records, S.No.45/1920, F.No.210/20, WBSA

19. 'Amendment to the official resolution No. 8 regarding non-Hindu Minorities', Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F. No. C-184(I), NMML.

20. Govind Gopal Desai to Dr. N. B. Khare, 18 December 1950, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-184(II), NMML.

21. Presidential address, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-184(II), NMML.

22. 'Non-Hindu Minorities', Hindu Mahasabha Papers, F.No. C-184(II), NMML.

23. This essay does not intend to go into the history of the foundation of the Jan Sangh, which has been dealt with in abundant details in Arya

(2001); Baxter (1969); Graham (1990); Jhangiani (1967); Madhok (1969), Puri (1980).

24. 'Presidential Address by Dr Syama Prasad Mookherjee at the Inaugural Meeting of the People's Party in Calcutta on 9th June, 1951', *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (I Installment), Speeches/Statements, Sl.No. 29, NMML.

25. Ibid.

26. *The Statesman*, 22 October 1951; 'History sheet of Shri Manmatha Nath Das', GB, IB, S.No.68/1930, F.No.140/30, WBSA.

27. 'M. R. Jayakar to S. P. Mookherji', 28 March 1951, *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (II-IV Installment), Sub. F. No. 168, NMML.

28. 'List of Representative Personnel', *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (II–IV Installment), Sub. F. No. 168, NMML.

29. See the list in the letter from Jagadish Prasad to Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, 16 October 1950, *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (II–IV Installment), Sub. F. No. 168, NMML.

30. 'Presidential speech by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukerji at the Annual Function of RSS at New Delhi on 3.12.50', *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (I Installment), Speeches/Statements, Sl.No. 13, NMML.

31. *The Statesman*, 22 October 1951.

32. Srutinath Chakraborti to Shyama Prasad Mookherji, 12 July 1951, Shyama Prasad Mookherji Papers (II–IV Installment), Subject File No. 164; also see, 'People's Party: List of Candidates for West Bengal Legislative Assembly, *S. P. Mookherji Papers* (II–IV Installment), F. No.171, NMML.

33. *The Statesman*, 6 November 1951.

34. See various reports on the campaign in GB, IB, S.No. 68/1930, F.No. 140/30, WBSA.

35. *The Statesman*, 22 December 1951.

36. *Election Manifesto 1951*, Akhil Bharat Hindu Maha Sabha, p. 8.

37. See the report on Shyama Prasad Mookherji's election speech in *The Statesman*, 4 November 1951.

38. S. R. Date, interview transcript, dated 17 April 1970, Cambridge South Asia Centre, No. S.32.

## CHAPTER 10

# B. R. Ambedkar and Indian Democracy

### Anupama Rao

> You are fighting for Swaraj. I am ready to join you. And I may assure you that I can fight better than you. I make only one condition. Tell me what share I am to have in Swaraj. If you don't want to tell me that and you want to make up with the British behind my back, hell on both of you.[1]

> The curse of untouchability is like a hydra-headed monster. You take away one of its heads, and two heads come out in its place. You remove it in one place, and it appears in another place. You try to cut it in one form and it appears in another form.[2]

> There is not a single political party in India today, which has got on its programmes an item that the practice of untouchability should continue. . .[3]

B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) is best remembered for leading a powerful struggle for untouchable rights and self-representation; for his extensive writings on caste as a form of inequality and historical injustice; and for his enduring effect on trajectories of democratic justice and affirmative action policy. His conversion to Buddhism in 1956, just months before his death, was perhaps his most radical gesture of all: it constituted a rejection of Hinduism, the faith into which Ambedkar was born, as well as a powerful critique of Hinduism's persistent negation of dalit humanity.

While there is extensive scholarship on M. K. Gandhi, there exists little by way of commentary and counter-commentary on Ambedkar's thought. Indeed studies of Gandhi have witnessed something of a revival in recent years with the publication of a range of studies that address Gandhi in global, as well as deeply vernacular contexts. One reason for the paucity of similar work on Ambedkar is the embarrassed treatment of caste both by scholars of anti-colonialism and by contemporary critics, many of whom prefer to believe that the 'caste question' was resolved through the institution of constitutional safeguards and an affirmative actions regime in 1950. Another reason for the occlusion of caste is due to the view of caste as the unhappy burden of those who suffer its excessive embodiment, that is, Dalits and the lower castes. There are problems with the adulation of Ambedkar too: his iconisation, and the substitution of hagiography for critical engagement precludes attention to the enormity of his contributions to democratic thinking. Though he is a key global thinker for radical democratic thought and studies in the politics of recognition, Ambedkar's contributions have been elided from genealogies of Indian political thought and intellectual history.

My own work addresses Ambedkar as an insurgent thinker who challenged established modalities of thought and activism by drawing on political and ethical possibilities that were globally conceived, yet deeply engaged with forms of subaltern difference. I elaborate on this issue below. However, let me briefly propose an itinerary for insurgent thought by suggesting that it is a mode of engagement by which one might stake a claim to the universal from the position of subalternity; that this thought's 'insurgence' is predicated on its resolute rejection of any association between material deprivation and intellectual destitution. Thus the claim to emancipated intelligence (and global thought worlds) is crucial to insurgent thinking. Examples include: W. E. B. Du Bois's intimacy with Greek mythology and Latin liturgy; Jotirao Phule's imagined affinity with the Emancipation Proclamation (and figures such as George Washington, and the Marquis de Lafayette); and Ambedkar's insistence on locating sub-continental events with reference to European and universal history (for example, Balkanisation, the Holocaust, or the history of Roman law) in his quest for models of redress and reparation in response to the hurtful history of caste and untouchability. Global connectivity between thought-worlds enabled commitments to critical thought and systematic critique as necessary precursors to subaltern resistance, while the imagination of subaltern equality was characterised by its defiant challenge to hegemonic history and exclusionary social structures. For instance, Fanon's conception of the 'wretched', like Ambedkar's recognition of the outcaste as *dalit* (lit. ground down, broken, shattered) were potent reminders of the effects of dehumanisation, and offered ways to remake degraded subjects through a politics of radical humanism. We can challenge the persistent reduction of anti-caste thinkers into movement leaders by instead recognising their commitment to the practice of critique, and their efforts to build coherence, systematicity, and iterability—theoretical justification, in brief—for practices of resistance.

My essay focuses on Ambedkar as a figure whose thought and activism transcends the divide of colonial/postcolonial history, which is typically framed around the dual axes of political Partition and Britain's transfer of power, and argues that we attend to his powerful efforts to challenge a restricted conception of the caste question and the foreclosure of more radical conceptions of social equality in the aftermath of political independence. Ambedkar's efforts to recalibrate the relationship of the social to the political, and his view of political agonism as central to public life are an enduring aspect of Indian democracy. Because Ambedkar's nationalism was deeply tied to his analysis of caste in Indian history, and because this account diverged so fundamentally from mainstream anticolonial responses to caste, it is worth addressing his thought along two registers. Ambedkar's interventions have become salient (and consequential) in our time, though his interventions were often received with downright hostility and resistance when they were first proposed: a close, contextual reading of his thought would thus remain inadequate for explaining the afterlife of concepts and keywords that were set in motion by this radical thinker of caste annihilation. Therefore what I propose to do is to engage in some combination of 'close' and 'far' reading that is capable of taking stock of the debates and interventions in which Ambedkar played a key role, while considering their implications for India's postcolonial democracy.

## AMBEDKAR BEFORE 1940

The famous debate with Gandhi over separate political representation, and the ensuing Poona Pact are typically associated with Ambedkar's emergence as a figure of national significance. To focus solely on the Poona Pact is to scant the immense intellectual labour that went into Ambedkar's efforts to redefine untouchable identity in the interwar period. Key among them was Ambedkar's effort to demarcate the Depressed Classes as a distinct group with separate interests, that is, as *non-Hindus*. In a series of representations before the Southborough and Simon Commissions, respectively, established to consider extension of franchise and the functioning of diarchy in the period between 1918 and 1928, Ambedkar argued that the Depressed Classes constituted a distinctive third constituency (along with Hindus and Muslims) with the need for political representation.[4] Two broad arguments characterised Ambedkar's position on Depressed Class representation between 1919 and 1928. The first was that any demand for separate representation ought to be a fall back option in the absence of adult franchise combined with reserved representation. The second defined Depressed Class representation from the Muslim separate electorate and emphasised that the Depressed Classes were distinguished by the civic and economic disabilities from which they suffered. Ambedkar thus argued from the position of a theory of representative government based on adult franchise to make demands on behalf of a (heretofore) unrecognised constituency, the Depressed Classes.

The significance of this move is both subtle and significant. Ambedkar was laying claim to a universal right *to* politics through the demand for universal franchise while challenging the exclusionary systems of colonial nomination, and the property qualification in the process (Balibar 1994). Once universal franchise was accepted, it would be possible to emphasise the material deprivation and civic exclusion of the depressed classes as an alternative basis for special representation, rather than the prevalent colonial association of minority identity with religious difference. In effect, Ambedkar was calling for a shift from religious identity, which was the basis of colonial recognition for the Muslim separate electorate, to the contingency of class. However, this definitional shift also required viewing the franchise more expansively, beyond the institutional exclusions justified by the education and property qualifications, not to mention the colonial system of nominated representation. Universal enfranchisement was therefore crucial for reconceiving anticolonial equality. Thus, at the Southborough Commission, Ambedkar argued that Depressed Class representation was contingent on the extension of adult franchise. This was an important critique of colonial models of limited representation that articulated with, and reproduced, upper-caste hegemony. Instead, (universal) enfranchisement could be used proactively to reveal *potential constituencies* or groups such as the Depressed Classes. Only then, Ambedkar suggested, could a subsequent reduction of the criteria of eligibility, that is, of the property (and taxation) qualification enable substantive Depressed Class representation. In essence, a formal commitment to universal enfranchisement could open the door to policy measures to effect substantive equality for vulnerable minorities. In turn, Ambedkar argued that reserved or communal seats could enhance Depressed Class representation in the Legislative Council, but that communal electorates had a better chance of ensuring the selection of candidates who truly represented the community's interest.[5] For untouchables, 'communal representation and self-determination are but two different phrases which express the same notion'.[6]

Ten years later, Ambedkar's representation to the Simon Commission marked a refinement of these arguments through a sustained critique of the Muslim separate electorate.[7] Distinguishing the Depressed Classes from the Muslims, Ambedkar described the former as 'educationally backward, that it is economically very poor, socially enslaved'.[8] As for Muslims, Ambedkar had argued before the Southborough Commission that Hindus could represent 'the *material* interests of the Mohammedans and vice versa'. Instead, material deprivation and social stratification united the Depressed Classes as alternate constituency defined by a *class interest*: they required protection due to their low social and economic status, and weightage due to their small numbers.

The principle of weightage was first articulated in connection with the Muslim electorate to address the demographic growth of the Muslim constituency over time, but as well, to acknowledge their 'historical and political importance'. Instead, Ambedkar highlighted the socio-economic status of the Depressed Classes, to demand similar measures for them. Representing the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, Ambedkar argued that weighted representation was 'literally showered upon a community like the Mahomedans holding a stronger and better position in the county than can be predicated of the depressed classes. The Sabha protests against this grading of the citizens of a country on the basis of their political importance'.[9] Ambedkar argued that if the position of Muslims as a demographic majority in Sind, Bengal, Punjab and the North-West Frontier Provinces, was acknowledged, it would be clear that the Muslim-majority provinces were an 'ingenious contrivance' that 'involved the maintenance of justice and peace by retaliation'.[10] Hindu and Muslim minorities would be ruled by fear and anxiety since they could be held hostage for the behaviour of their co-religionists in other parts of the country, 'For if the Hindu majority tyrannized the Muslim minority in the Hindu provinces the scheme provides a remedy whereby the Mohammedan majorities get a field to tyrannize the Hindu minorities in the five Mohammedan provinces. It is a system of protection by counterblast against blast; terror against terror and eventually tyranny against tyranny'.[11] Ambedkar was arguing that Muslims could utilise the principle of nationality (and territorial dominance), and not of political minority. This was prescient, but it was also politically potent.

During the 1930s, Muslim politics came to articulate a position on nationality that challenged the politics of number, and the demographic calculus that had been set in place by colonial technologies of objectification such as the census, and limited franchise. While majority and minority were enumerated entities within the nation, the nation form was organised around affective bonds, the feeling of commonality. Ambedkar's engagement with the distinction between a politics of minority and one of nationality organises his *Pakistan, or the Partition of India*, published in 1940. Here I want to underscore what was enabled through such comparison. Ambedkar had focused on aggregating an as-yet unrecognised minority, the Depressed Classes through two sets of interconnected strategies: he argued that like Muslims, the Depressed Classes were minorities with a distinctive history, identity and set of interests that set them apart from the Hindu community at large. Next, he went further to argue that deprivation and social marginalisation, rather than religious identification ought to form the basis of minority identity. Indeed Ambedkar characterised the relationship between caste Hindus and untouchables as a 'fundamental and deadly antagonism', and argued:

> The first thing I submit is that we [Untouchables, Depressed Classes] claim that we must be treated as a distinct minority, separate from the Hindu community: a distinct and independent minority. Secondly I should like to submit that the Depressed Classes minority needs far

> greater political protection than any other minority in British India for the simple reason that it is educationally backward, that it is economically very poor, socially enslaved and suffers from certain grave political disabilities from which no other community suffers. Then I would submit that, as a matter of demand for our political protection, we claim representation on the same basis as the Mahomeddan minority. We claim reserved seats if accompanied by adult franchise.[12]

Let us extrapolate the immense significance of these efforts. If the Depressed Classes, Hindus and Muslims could be said to constitute *three* distinct communities of interest, with the Depressed Classes forming 18–20 per cent of the population, then this third community disturbed the idea that only 'fixed permanent communities' existed in political space. The Depressed Classes were defined by the principle of socio-economic status and material deprivation, rather than the primordial distinctions of religion. As a third community produced by the practice of power and inequality, the very existence of this community challenged the colonial obsession with Hindu and Muslim communities as primordial communities and corporate political actors. As well, Hindu majoritarianism was also compromised. Increasingly, the Depressed Classes came to be defined as a community that Hinduism produced outside or apart from itself. Ambedkar had subverted the colonial discourse that equated religious community with constituency by suggesting a *fundamental* contradiction between Hindus and untouchables.

Thus, behind the historic confrontation of 1932 were a set of prior transformations in Ambedkar's strategic engagement with the political theory of representative democracy: this involved utilising and enacting a shift from the discourse of universal franchise, to specifying the grounds on which political representation for the Depressed Classes could be justified, that is, through their separation from Hindus, and by drawing on a discourse of minority that allied them with Muslim politics, while simultaneously marking the difference.

We will recall that Gandhi bitterly challenged Depressed Class efforts at separate representation at the Second Round Table Conference. However, Gandhi agreed to a compromise solution on the stalled question of minority rights, which would be decided by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, though he had then embarked on a fast-unto-death (20–24 September) to challenge the provisions of the Communal Award of 16 August 1932. That Award gave the Depressed Classes a separate electorate in areas where they were concentrated, in addition to a general vote. The Communal Award was a critical moment in the governmental discourse on caste because it clearly marked the anomalous status of the Depressed Classes as a political minority whose identity was inseparable from their status as degraded Hindus. Its denouement, the Poona Pact compromise between Ambedkar and Gandhi, instituted reserved representation, and an increase in seats reserved for Depressed Class candidates (from 71 to 148). The system of two-tier election allowed a primary election in Depressed Class constituencies, which would then produce a slate of candidates for whom a general Hindu electorate would cast their vote.

Like the text that appeared a decade later, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (1945), Ambedkar's incendiary text, *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) responded to the foreclosure of social equality that Ambedkar apprehended in the response to untouchability as it developed in the final decades of the interwar period. A close reading of those texts falls outside the scope of this essay. I merely mark here the discourse of negative or negated identity, that is, the position of the Depressed Classes as *non-Hindu* that had come to occupy a central and defining place in Ambedkar's thought.

## PROBLEM OF SCHEDULED CASTE REPRESENTATION

In the 1940s, the discourse on Scheduled Caste representation fundamentally changed. (Indeed as is well known, the bureaucratic terminology for referring to 'untouchables' had changed in 1935 from 'Depressed Classes' to 'Scheduled Castes' identified by a state-wise schedule.) In his speech of 20 August 1940 which offered India dominion status, Lord Linlithgow acknowledged the Scheduled Castes as a separate political constituency whose consent must be secured in the process of Britain's transfer of power.[13] Ambedkar was invited to join the Viceroy's Council. As this invitation coincided with the launch of Congress's Quit India Movement, Ambedkar was accused of being an imperialist stooge.[14]

At the time Gandhi argued, somewhat disingenuously, that though there was

> . . . talk of the Hindus forming the majority community [,] Hinduism is an elastic indefinable term, and Hindus are not a homogenous whole like Muslims and Christians. . . . In other words and in reality so far as India is concerned, there can only be political parties and no majority or minority communities. The cry of the tyranny of the majority is a fictitious cry. (Gandhi 1939: 312)

However, Lord Wavell continued as late as 1944 to argue with Mahatma Gandhi that the Scheduled Castes constituted a 'separate element in the national life of India'.[15] Yet resistance to separate Scheduled Caste representation grew.

The focus on religious difference, rather than community inequality and exclusion became political commonsense, so much so that the Cripps Mission held that only religious minorities were entitled to separate representation.[16] Cripps' refusal to support Scheduled Caste demands for separate representation was described as a 'conspiracy of silence' between 'the Government, the Congress and even the Muslims'.[17] It was the immediate trigger for Ambedkar's establishment of the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF), formed at a Nagpur conference in July 1942.[18] The AISCF Working Committee even argued that Dalits were a religious minority and described Congress hegemony as leading to 'the annihilation of our people as a political entity'.[19] Ambedkar strongly objected to the Cripps betrayal, arguing,

> Up to the declaration of 8th August 1940 His Majesty's Government's view was that the untouchables were a distinct and a separate element and that they constituted so important an element that their consent was necessary for any constitutional changes that may be desire.[20]

Ambedkar noted that though the Scheduled Castes had enjoyed Muslim political support, the politics of Muslim nationalism now pitted Muslims against all other communities. He saw the Muslim League setting up 'a new equation of values . . . that the Muslims, whatever their numbers, are just as equal to the non-Muslims and therefore in any political arrangement the Muslims must get fifty percent'.[21] *The Muslim League had trumped number with nationality.*[22] The urgent task now was to find recognition for untouchables as 'a separate element' in the national life of India. Physical separation was proposed through establishment of Scheduled Caste villages, on government wastelands and private lands, overseen by a government-established Settlement Commission.[23] Village committees would form the basic AISCF organisational unit and provide funds through a tax on constituents.[24]

This was out of synch with the political proclivities of other Dalit leaders. M. C. Rajah, chairman of the Depressed India Association and Ambedkar's most important rival, had demanded separate electorates all along. However, he issued a joint declaration with the Hindu Mahasabha demanding reserved seats for Depressed Class candidates, and noted that a separate electorate was only viable if the colonial government was the 'special protector of Minority interests'. Under changed political conditions, it was imperative that the Depressed Classes, who lacked an 'effective percentage', amalgamate themselves into the Hindu constituency provided they got reserved seats.[25] Apparently constituencies could play the game of parity only if the colonial state adopted the role of ringmaster.[26]

Rajah's position apparently triumphed since the Scheduled Castes played no part in the critical Simla discussions of 1945.[27] The Cabinet Mission visited India from March–June 1946 to discuss the interim government and a new constitution for India: Congress was identified as the chosen representative of all constituencies except for the Muslims. However, the Cabinet Mission Award of 16 May 1946 recognised three constituencies: General (this included Hindus and others), Muslim and Sikh. While the Scheduled Castes did not have separate representation, they would be accommodated within an Advisory Committee to the Constituent Assembly drawn from provincial legislatures.

This betrayal by the British government inflected the tone of Ambedkar's *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, a vehement attack on Congress hegemony published in 1945, a few years before the violent onset of Partition. It was an extended reflection on the Poona Pact compromise as the root cause of the failures of the 1940s. Ambedkar wrote that the Communal Award had redressed the political weakness of the Depressed Classes by making Hindus dependent on their vote. The second vote given by the Communal Award was a priceless privilege. Its value as a political weapon was beyond reckoning. . . . No caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the Untouchables in his constituency or be hostile to their interests if he were made dependent upon the votes of the Untouchables (Ambedkar 1945: 90).

Although it was animated by an enormous sense of betrayal, text was among Ambedkar's most important engagements with political liberalism. Moving from his earlier focus on redefining the colonial category of minority so as to include the Depressed Classes as an especially deserving group, Ambedkar now targeted Hindu majoritarianism and its political representative, the Congress, for reproducing caste hegemony *through* the franchise. His immediate focus was the defeat of Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) candidates in the historic election of 1946, a result tantamount to accepting Congress as representing Scheduled Caste interests.[28] His broader concern, however, was with how to demarcate a distinctive Scheduled Caste interest within the field of liberal politics.

Ambedkar's analysis began with the Poona Pact provisions pertaining to the selection of Scheduled Caste representatives. This was a two-tier process where Scheduled Caste voters selected a group of Scheduled Caste candidates in a primary election. Later, they voted together with the general electorate to choose a Scheduled Caste candidate for the reserved constituencies.[29] Ambedkar argued that because Caste Hindus could ultimately swing their votes towards a palatable Scheduled Caste candidate, the initial selection of candidates by Scheduled Caste voters, too, would be dictated by the unstated bias of producing a list of Scheduled Caste representatives who would be acceptable to the general (Hindu) electorate: Scheduled Caste interests were thus ultimately subservient to the political proclivities of the general constituency. Ambedkar noted that the system of reserved constituencies worked in favour of Congress, which put up Depressed Class candidates in *both* reserved and general constituencies. This was meant to substantiate the Congress claim that untouchables were Hindus, and that Congress represented a wide range of interests including that of the Scheduled Castes. Without the separate electorate, which essentially transformed the principle of minority into a logic of (political) exception, the Scheduled Caste electorate remained a numerical minority subservient to Hindu interests.

Likewise, distributive voting weakened Depressed Class self-representation. Ambedkar's argument against distributive voting focused on the skewed results of the 'one person, one vote' principle, versus the aggregative logic of cumulative voting. For instance, if voters typically distributed their votes across five different candidates, the cumulative voting system recommended by Ambedkar aggregated votes so that voters could show their preference for one or two candidates. Scheduled Caste voters who had been chosen in the primaries (as the choice of the Scheduled Castes) would then find themselves confronting caste Hindu candidates on a more even, if agonistic terrain.[30]

Ambedkar's critique of the electoral process and the Congress was interpreted to reflect his pro-British, anti-nationalist stance.[31] This effectively rendered his own efforts to position himself as *a nationalist critic of Congress politics* untenable. One Congress detractor declared *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done* to be 'an incoherent jumble' without order or justification, determined to represent Gandhi and the Congress as 'wholly evil' (Santhanam 1946: 2). This author argued that the text was structured so as to refute Congress claims to represent the nation, and that there was an attempted step-by-step illustration of Hindu democracy as an oxymoronic concept. C. Rajagopalachari went further to argue that the Scheduled Castes had no claims on a separate democracy:

> The Scheduled Castes are evenly distributed all over India and are about ten per cent of the population. . . . Thus distributed, they have to be part of the general population and cannot isolate themselves into a separate democracy. Nothing therefore follows from the argument even if conclusively proved that the Scheduled Castes do not stand behind the Congress and do not support its claim for political freedom. (Rajagopalachari 1946: 5–6)

Ambedkar's critique of the non-representative character of the Congress was thus a moot point since 'it may often be impossible to get minorities to agree to the claims for self-government which is majority rule even though the minorities be fully protected in their civil and political rights' (ibid.: 8–9). Another text, K. Santhanam's *Ambedkar's Attack*, also discounted the Scheduled Castes as a territorially dispersed minority. 'Whether there are 50 or 60 millions, it is of minor importance. I may point out that they are distributed almost evenly in all the villages of India. In each village they constitute a minority' (Santhanam 1946: 20). Santhanam was essentially arguing that a community without demographic concentration had to accept its status as a 'Hindu' minority. This was of a piece, of course, with Congress insistence on characterising the AISCF as a communal organisation. Ambedkar, not the Congress, was said to hold on to untouchability as a 'precious possession', resisting assimilation and integration. Scheduled Caste representation was also posed as a 'short cut' to political power for leaders who benefited from safeguards enjoyed by their community (ibid.: 33–34).

In the course of time, the Poona Pact would be represented as having resolved the issue of political representation because it had settled the issue of the religious identity of the Depressed Classes. That is to say, while Ambedkar had foregrounded the interconnection between the 'religious' and 'political' aspects of untouchability in his efforts to endow the Depressed Classes with distinctive political value, the high politics of transition emphasised Dalits' political negligibility by reaffirming their position as Hindus. Ironically, Sir Stafford Cripps acknowledged as much, and noted that, '. . . owing to the operation of what is known as the Poona Pact, they [Ambedkar's party] have been almost entirely excluded from the provincial assemblies'.[32]

Ambedkar continued to maintain that the political significance of the Depressed Classes derived from their status as an exceptional community defined by material and religious exclusion. He adhered to the view that the Hindu majority was a communal majority and not a political one, since it could not be 'made and unmade'. He had repeatedly tried to transform political discourse by naming the specificity of Dalits' oppression and their minority position yet separate representation appeared to be impossible for a stigmatised, territorially dispersed community. If political separation was a stymied project of the 1940s, Buddhist conversion replaced it. This project of radical self-making was enabled by Ambedkar's engagement with the political ethics of Hinduism, and his radical reinterpretation of texts such as the *Rig Veda* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which allowed him to focalise the lost worlds of Buddhist heterodoxy that had given way to Brahminical hegemony.

## Constitution and Postcolonial Transition

The last all-India Census was undertaken in 1931, on the understanding that caste categories were attaining fixity as a primary identity and that national integration was precluded in the process. Reservations in educational institutions and public sector undertakings were envisaged as temporary measures to be renewed for a decade at a time. In addition, advanced caste groups were to be removed incrementally from the roster of groups eligible for quotas, culminating in a final 'descheduling' of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Backward Class communities by 1981, the end of the Sixth Five-Year Plan. Today, however, the population of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and Other Backward Classes—all those entitled to some form of constitutional protection—together exceeds 50 per cent of the population even though the Constitution stipulates a 50 per cent cut-off for reservations. The *majority* of castes are defined as suffering from some form of social deprivation and 'backwardness'. Indeed, caste has taken on a class-like terminology, while the term 'class' has been interpreted by Indian law courts to subsume caste, now understood as but one indicator, if a significant one, of a group's socio-economic development.[33] What political practices develop around the fissure between a domain occupied by citizen-subjects and beneficiaries of caste privileges, and another by a majority that is defined as historically discriminated? What happens when policies of equalisation, usually viewed as temporary and exceptional measures, become normative mechanisms of social integration? Does the legislation of caste identity enable new engagements with the state?

The tensions become clear when we examine them as reflecting a founding tension in the Indian Constitution. Foreshortening what was for Western democracies a contentious, incremental process of franchise expansion, India immediately enabled her illiterate and impoverished masses to participate in the political process through universal enfranchisement. Franchise is juxtaposed to an acknowledged long-term history of differential community rights and persistent, complex forms of ritual and cultural inequality. While 'the people' do appear in the Indian Constitution in their general aspect as citizens of a sovereign nation-state, they are more often named in their particularity marked by class, caste and religion. The putative equality of Indian citizens proceeds by detours through particularity. In the aftermath of Partition, Muslims lost their status as the model minority, giving up the separate electorate 'in the national interest' (Granville 1999; Bajpai n.d.; Jha 2002, 2004). From the Constitution's distinctive focus on social and economic equality came a new category of persons, 'the poor'. Caste, however, was at the very the centre of constitutional commitments to social justice. Both a traditional category and a social evil, caste was to be excised from the body politic at all cost.

And thus the Scheduled Caste citizen was given a distinctive identity in the period between 1947 and 1955 through constitutional protections that equalised her status with regard to other citizens of the republic. These included the abolition of untouchability by Article 17 of India's Constitution, followed by the institution of protective laws and affirmative action policies. With the nation aligned with the Hindu community in the years leading up to and following Partition, state protection of Dalits' rights as minority rights was placed on new footing through the institution of civil rights, and the secularisation of Hinduism (Galanter 1998). It is well known that Ambedkar's efforts to reform the Hindu family and intimate relations floundered not only because of deep-seated resistance to reform of the Hindu family, but due to social prejudice against a *Dalit* Law Minister who sought to change *Hindu* law.[34] His efforts to transform caste into a civic disability and a form of socio-economic backwardness found greater success, but it did so in indirectly and through Ambedkar's more diffuse 'influence' over the Constitution as a whole.[35] The reservations regime inaugurated a specific form of legal exception, what Marc Galanter calls 'compensatory discrimination' that marked out a very special place for the Scheduled Castes in the constitutional vision. This vision heuristically divided social space into two zones, one governed by market principles of competition and putative merit, and one populated by those who suffered historic discrimination and became the objects of state's intervention.

The Indian Constitution is the ultimate guarantor of citizens' rights through acts of equalisation via positive discrimination for socially marginal and deprived populations. Quite simply these moves anticipate a significant transformation of civil society by the state: whereas a liberal democracy commits to the sanctity of specific procedures believed to guarantee unbiased outcomes, the Indian Constitution specified a desired outcome and instituted policies to bridge the gulf separating the ideal of social equality from present conditions. The major historian of the Indian Constitution, Granville Austin noted long ago that the Indian Constitution was an awkward and incendiary document: awkward because the colonial Government of India Act of 1935 established the federal structure and the administrative mechanisms by which the nation was administered, while the constitutional spirit emanated from the Objective Resolution of the December 1946 Assembly Session which called, among other things, for constitutional safeguards for vulnerable communities. Austin notes that the Constitution 'may be seen as having three strands: protecting and enhancing national unity and integrity; establishing the institutions and spirit of democracy; and fostering a social revolution to better the lot of the mass of Indian' (1996: 6).

Those aspects of the Constitution that signal its historic role in effecting political transition appears in the discretionary powers of the state to effect social revolution, even at the risk of foreclosing other fundamental rights such as the right to property, for instance. Noteworthy in Part III of the Constitution, is the abolition of untouchability under Article 17, while Articles 15(2), 23, and 24 articulate rights relating to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. Ambedkar argued that the most significant feature of the fundamental rights is that these rights are justiciable, a right secured by the right to move to the Supreme Court for enforcement of fundamental rights under Article 32. The force of Ambedkar's interventions are reflected in the 'protective discrimination scheme', or the reservation policy of the government that is envisaged under certain provisions of Part III but more significantly by those elements of Part IV of the Constitution, in the Directive Principles of State Policy that address the constitutional mandate to ameliorate the condition of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the other backward classes.

There are a number of consequences that follow from the conflict between a liberal conception of fundamental rights as the right to private property and personal integrity, on the one hand, and the alignment of personal freedom with freedom from social discrimination: this conflict structures the very conception of 'fundamental rights', and animates the contentious consequences that follow. Another set of contradictions is evinced by the articulation of 'directive principles' which cannot be enforced by the courts as procedural law, but that nonetheless organise the social imaginary. Thus the division between Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles also enacts a divide between procedural and substantive law insofar as the Directive Principles articulate the principle of popular sovereignty and the capacity to hold law responsible to the demands of justice. Efforts to secure the Directive Principles have also enmeshed the courts in a number of contentious political battles. One might argue that a major consequence of the anticolonial context in which a republican democracy was imagined, lies in the fact that the substantive equality that was imagined by constitution-makers such as Ambedkar also requires active policy intervention. Nor should it be surprising that it was the demographic majority, which lacked social privilege that became the target of redress and reparation.

The first front of caste equalisation was the secularisation of Hinduism. Article 26 of the Constitution guarantees that castes, viewed here as (religious) sects, have the right to exist, to maintain their own religious and charitable institutions,[36] and to manage their internal affairs. Similarly, Article 30 gives religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. But Indian secularism is also committed to religious equality (Pandey 1990), and seeks to balance rights to religious practice against the commitment to religious equality. Article 25(2)(b) opens Hindu temples to all Hindus, placing at odds the rights of sub-sects and the right of equal access to religious institutions by all caste individuals.[37] In fact, the commitment to caste equality blurs the boundary between religious and secular rights. Lawmakers and courts have implicitly acknowledged their right to intervene in and reorganise religious practice (Bhargava 1998).

The second front of equalisation is democratisation through caste, insofar as equality has been specified as *equality between castes*.[38] What legal historian Marc Galanter has called 'compensatory discrimination' is 'very much a domestic product, produced with little guidance or borrowing from abroad' (1984: 361); it is a unique kind of civil rights law which takes caste as a class-like structure of deprivation and impoverishment. Untouchability is singled out in this framework through a series of exceptional legal measures that reflect Dalits' distinctive place in the political unconscious. There are three categories of reservations: (*a*) in legislative bodies, government service, educational institutions, and milder forms in housing and land allotment; (*b*) such programmes as scholarships, grants, loans, healthcare, legal aid for Scheduled Castes; (*c*) special measures, mostly legislative, to protect Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from practices such as bonded labour, untouchability and land alienation.

The presumed obviousness of the category of Scheduled Caste served as an exemplary means of defining those groups entitled to 'preferential' treatment by the state.

And finally, an elaborate set of criminal laws to punish the perpetrators of untouchability was also passed in tandem with affirmative action laws, starting with the passage of the Untouchability Offences Act (1955). Each amendment to this Act has called for more stringent punishment for the perpetrators of caste crime. So much so that with passage of the Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989), had expanded the field of caste crime to include political, ritual and symbolic acts. For instance, Section 3(1) placed humiliation—caste insults, coercion to eat or drink noxious substances—on par with denial of access to water sources, public property and thoroughfares, sexual violence against Dalit women, economic dispossession such as land grabs and demands to perform bonded labour, as well as efforts to prevent Dalits from voting, or holding political office. In fact atrocity laws have defined 'untouchability' as consisting of acts of violence and humiliation that assume equivalence between hurtful words and harmful deeds. A complex bureaucracy to monitor and manage instances of anti-Dalit violence has taken shape around atrocity legislation.

The legislation of caste, and its relationship to an expansion of democratic aspiration is central to any understanding of contemporary India.[39] Caste's constitutional legacy was affected by the longer-term politicisation of untouchability as the paradigm for understanding extreme social inequality, as much its legislation by the Indian Constitution set the terms for future social and political struggle: Ambedkar played a constitutive role in both instances. Let us briefly turn, however, to the political legacy of Ambedkar in Maharashtra, where the effects of Buddhist conversion and political separation were experienced outside the domain of law and constitutionalism, and created new spaces of popular mobilisation.

## AFTER AMBEDKAR

What was Ambedkar's legacy for Dalits, and for Dalit politics in the first decades of the Indian republic? I take up this issue here through a regional case study, significant because of its long association with anti-caste activism, and innovations in Ambedkarite politics in particular.

It is typically assumed that Dalit politicians were coopted by the Congress, or seduced by possibilities for political corruption which led to an overall weakening of attention to issues of education, inequality, and radical democracy. Instead, I want to propose a significant shift in analytical attention towards the domain of symbolic politics, if we are to understand how Dalit aspiration was channelled in the first two decades after national Independence. Focusing on symbolic contentions over Ambedkar's legacy, I maintain, reflects the maturation of Dalit politics in the period, one that has remained a crucial axis of political subject-formation that is intimately—though not exclusively—connected to the demographically negligible position of the Dalit and her exclusion from sites of social production. Initially this manifest, however, as an internecine struggle over the power to represent the Dalit as political subject.

Having embraced the political universalism of the Constitution and the ethicality of Buddhism, B. R. Ambedkar had little enthusiasm for a linguistic state based on equivalence between caste, region and history.[40] Despite, however, such scepticism, the Republican Party of India (RPI) formed soon after his death in 1956, allied itself not only with the Praja Socialists and the *Shetkari Kamgar Paksha* (Peasant and Workers Party), but with the *Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti* to demand a separate Maharashtra during the elections of 1957 and 1961.[41] Like the caste-class model of the earlier Independent Labour Party (1936) that sought to dissuade Dalits from gravitating towards communist parties (Kshirsagar 1979: 36), the RPI also used the language of class and labour exploitation to position Dalits at the forefront of the struggle to unite the *shoshit* (exploited) classes for total emancipation—religious, socio-political and economic.[42] The RPI thus maintained continuity with earlier ILP and SCF mobilisation strategies, consisting of coalitions between Dalits mill labourers, municipal and railway workers, and the rural poor on the one hand, and labour unions, and peasant organisations on the other. However, the first RPI factional split came quickly, in 1958, as a young, urban, educated group broke away from the largely rural and illiterate, if charismatic, activist leadership of B. K. Gaikwad to form the *durustha* (reformed) RPI led by B. C. Kamble.[43] Generational differences, functional styles and political ideology drove the acrimonious split.

The symbolic significance of the RPI, however, remained. As Jayashree Gokhale-Turner notes,

> Being a Dalit and specifically a member of the Mahar-Buddhist community, implied a visceral, if at the same time a vestigial, loyalty to the political form which Ambedkar left behind. . . . The RPI embodied a dual set of allegiances, to the figure and personality of Ambedkar which had become the transcendent "myth" of the movement, and to their own history and the reworking of the history which the movement had brought about. (Gokhale-Turner 1980: 255)

While Ambedkar appeared to have rejected Marx for Buddha, significant strains of his thought resonated with Marxian critiques of labour exploitation and pro-poor rhetoric. B. C. Kamble hit a nerve when he warned in a criticism of the Gaikwad faction, or the so-called *dhotarachi gat* (dhoti-wearing faction), that an RPI coalition with the communists would destroy Dalit autonomy. 'When Congress got power they destroyed Ambedkar's organisation and now the communists are getting Dadasaheb's support and they are conducting a mischievous smear campaign against Ambedkar' (Kamble 1965: 25). Kamble thought the *bhumiheen satyagrahas* (satyagrahas of the landless) and urban labour coalitions with leftists compromised Ambedkar's vision of an autonomous Dalit party. Communists were using untouchables, and rendering them part of an anonymous proletariat. The RPI's Young Turks were caustically described by the Dalit writer Raosaheb Kasbe as anxious to 'join the ruling class', and focused on furthering the interests of an emerging Mahar urban elite—the so-called 'Dalit Brahmins'—through reservations, jobs, education and political representation (Kasbe 1980). As this new RPI began to move away from mass organising in urban and rural areas, its dependence on mainstream political parties increased.[44] By 1974, the party had split into four factions. Congress co-optation of RPI leaders exacerbated factionalism within the party and continued to produce breakaway groups too numerous to outline here.

Political factionalism underscored a deeper set of transformations: participation in democratic politics and demands for access to education and employment had exacerbated cleavages between urban and rural Dalits, between impoverished agricultural labourers and the upwardly mobile, derogatorily referred to as *shasanache javai* (government's son-in-law), beneficiaries of the reservations regime. Although academic observers attribute Dalit assertion to this vigorous, urbanised middle class, the transformation of Dalit politics does not completely submit to the sociology of constituency. How, then, do we understand these fissiparous tendencies?

One standard argument has been to associate Indian politics with the factionalisation of power amongst local caste and landed elites, which reflects the tendency of political scientists to equate ideology with material interest (Carter 1974; Hardiman 1982; Kothari 1970a; Orenstein 1965). I want to reframe the discussion by recalling Ambedkar's prescient analysis of the impossibility of representing Dalits' political interests due to their demographically negligible position, and their exclusion from sites of social production and self-representation.[45] As noted earlier, symbolic politics became a crucial axis of political subject-formation partly due to the political vulnerability of the Dalit communities. It was also related to the crisis of leadership that followed Ambedkar's demise. Finally, this reflected an inherent tension at the very heart of Dalit identity: was 'Dalit' an identity, or did it signal a political potentiality that exceeded those communities that were governmentally designated 'untouchable'?

Both the RPI, and a new political contender, the Dalit Panthers, laid claim to Ambedkar and made him a key symbolic site for reworking the Dalit past and the Dalit self. Ambedkar's auratic name and a consistent return to Ambedkarite symbolism—whether through installations of Ambedkar statues in rural areas, the proliferation of the *nila jhanda* (the RPI's blue flag) or the distinctive greeting, 'Jai Bhim' (Hail Bhim, or Ambedkar)— blessed Dalit political activism of all stripes even when such activism reflected significant emendation of Ambedkar's own project. Ambedkar was a floating signifier, a sign attached to a diverse range of social practices and political demands that brought them all into a unified domain of action and visibility: Dalit politics. The name was a fetish object circulating through diverse arenas and accruing greater signifying power, as were iconic representations of Ambedkar. There is thus no easy distinction between symbolic and 'real' politics. Evoking Ambedkar's name and interpreting his legacy produced materially consequential responses that in turn came to define public perceptions of Dalit politics.

In June 1972, the newspapers *Navakal* and *Prajasattak* noted the formation the Dalit Panthers under organisers Arjun Dangle, Namdeo Dhasal and J. V. Pawar. Another leader, Raja Dhale, had been politicised by the RPI's youth wing, the *Yuvak Kranti Dal* (Revolutionary Youth Movement), begun in 1969. The Panthers expressed antagonism to the RPI, offered vitriolic criticism of the corruption of Dalit political leaders, and devastating criticism of state violence. Their claims to self-representation, and their anti-establishmentarianism also brought the Dalit Panthers into direct conflict with the Shiv Sena (Mane 1976).

The Panthers' posture of taking on state government and ossified RPI leadership was persuasive, if measured by the spread of their *chhavanis* across Bombay. By using a term designating the march of the Mahar military unit, the Panthers signalled a militant urban presence. Within a year, they established 32 Bombay chhavanis of 25 members each and had branches all over Maharashtra by 1974. The hierarchical organisation culminated in a central body that met annually.[46] In fact, chhavani organisation resembled the *shakha* grid of the Shiv Sena.[47] Despite the disciplined structure envisioned by the Panthers' Constitution, chhavanis—like the Sena *shakhas* and unlike the tightly disciplined RSS shakha—were largely autonomous, often started on impulse, and loosely funded at public meetings and through journalism. Handbills or progressive newspapers such as *Navashakti* and *Navakal* published notices of impulsively organised meetings and *morchas* (processions). It was hard to coordinate the growing chhavanis[48] and to control members.[49] Decentralised structure was their strength and their undoing: the Panthers had no single leader, no uniting ideology, and no long-term strategy. In fact, branches and leaders often came into conflict with each other. Nonetheless, public meetings served as ecstatic commemorations and public affirmations of a despised and denigrated identity now re-signified as political potential (Dhasal: 117). The capacity for storing and accumulating the energy of these meetings was simply not built into the organisational structure Panther leaders established.

What is clear is that the Panthers sought a new grammar of political charisma. Rather than replicating existing symbologies of political virtue, they challenged canonical representations of the Brahminical subject and political leadership. Without a developed alternative, however, their politics remained experimental. The RPI–Panthers conflict would further enhance the sheer visibility of Dalits in urban Bombay. (Visibility produced very different consequences in rural areas, but this is not an issue we can take up here.)

This complex and highly politicised world of subaltern neighbourhoods, Congress co-optation, and internal debate shaped Dalit politics in the 1970s. The war of words between the Panthers and the RPI took place through privately circulated pamphlets. RPI leaders were accused of '[filling] their pockets' while trampling on the 'Doctor's revolutionary heritage'.[50] The RPI was 'entangled in the wheels of getting votes, reservations, reserved posts, [and] they ignored the issues of rural Dalits and their problems. . . . this is the legacy of Ambedkar's party'.[51] B. C. Kamble was a favourite target of attack. The Panthers inquired, 'Are these leaders, especially B. C. Kamble, even worthy of polishing Ambedkar's shoes?' (*Babanca boot pusaychi layak ahe ka?*)[52] The Panthers declared, 'If we give our futures over to such neutered leaders then we will be destroyed. And therefore we say, today, with bowed heads, that we and the Republican Party share no blood ties.'[53] The father had been killed and a new lineage begun.

Dalit Buddhism was a special point of tension. The reformed RPI's B. C. Kamble, positioning Dalits in the vanguard of struggles for social justice, noted, 'Shiv Sena and the Communists have the same criticism of RPI—that it is a Dalit-specific party' (Kamble 1965: 7). Dalit Buddhists paid a price for conversion: a restrictive Dalit identity and perception of the RPI as a party of and for Buddhists. Likewise, state orientation to converted Buddhists was a contentious matter.[54] A 1950 President's Order included Buddhists in the Backward Classes and excluded them from Scheduled Caste reservations even though Buddhism was legally defined as a Hindu sect.[55] As courts equated conversion with loss of constitutional safeguards, [56] Dalit Buddhists found themselves in the ironic position of claiming that though changed in their 'mind and manners', Buddhists were 'despised and disgraced', and continued to 'suffer from [the] stigma of untouchability'. Buddhists had to qualify the more radical implication of Buddhist conversion and argued, 'the Conversion is mainly intended for spiritual and cultural elevation and not for any material gain or benefit' (Bhandare 1964: 204). The outcome was that Dalits had found it difficult to prove their conversion, and when they did, they were barred from entitlements of the reservations because they were Buddhists, and not Scheduled Castes.[57] As a pamphlet noted, the irony of affirmative action was that it required Buddhists to identify stigmatised Hindus, as Scheduled Castes.[58] However, Maharashtra began treating Buddhists on par with Scheduled Castes in 1972 as a result of political pressure.[59]

Ambedkar's double legacy also divided the Panthers between Buddhist and Marxist interpretations of Dalit history, the Dalit self, and conflict over the best strategy for Dalit emancipation.[60] Supporters of Namdeo Dhasal were drawn to Marxism, while Buddhism (and an emphasis on the separate cultural and religious identity of Dalit Mahars) predominated among the supporters of Raja Dhale. In sum, Dhale argued that the fundamental conflict of Indian society was produced by the untouchable's degraded position within the caste Hindu order, while Dhasal insisted that the broader significance of Dalit liberation lay in its inspiration for a variety of collective struggles of the dispossessed and marginalised.[61] These were protracted, vituperative exchanges replete with accusations of personal corruption such as accepting bribes, womanising, and imibibing alcohol. Despite both high-minded rhetoric and crass questing for power, this was a struggle over Ambedkar's legacy. Dhale argued that Ambedkar was a 'revolutionary leader' whose 'greatness' was evident in his political leadership and Buddhist conversion (Dhale 1976). Dhasal argued that Ambedkar's ideas had to be rendered adequate to changing historical circumstances, creatively re-interpreted to be relevant to the times. Firmly convinced of the material basis of caste exploitation, he wanted to recess Buddhist identity and form coalitions with the left. His support for the CPI in the 1974 elections became the most visible bone of contention. Dhale (1974) warned against trusting the communists who were out to expand their political base, not to support the Dalit agenda, and in effect, to divert Dalits from the fight against untouchability.[62] As one Panther wrote, 'There cannot be a merging of Ambedkarvad and Marxvad'.[63] Dhasal was ejected from the Panthers in October 1974.[64]

In essence, the debate between Buddha and Marx that animated Ambedkar's efforts to specify Dalit emancipation was replayed first within the RPI, and later between the RPI, and the Panthers. Though politically salient, they were also conceptually consequent: Was Dalit and identity, or the horizon of radical possibility?

## IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The making of a contentious Ambedkarite legacy appears to be forgotten when set against the current glorification of Ambedkar as

Dalit icon, rather than insurgent thinker. Instead, my essay has tried to map the complex set of readings that are enabled when we engage with Ambedkar in 'his' time, but with the benefit of a retroactive reading that addresses both the question of *why* Ambedkar might have thought and acted as he did, and his continued relevance for understanding India's postcolonial democracy in a manner that transcends the specificity of his biography. To fully inhabit Ambedkar's insurgence requires working at the interstices of his intellectual biography, on the one hand, and adopting strategies of critical reading on the other. It also requires carving out for anti-caste thought a distinctive space between its complex globality, and its existential or embodied specificity. Most of all, it asks us to think against political foreclosures and recall forgotten possibilities, and to give the 'what might have been' and the 'otherwise' serious, scholarly attention.

## NOTES

1. Ambedkar, *Bombay Sentinel*, 28 April 1942.

2. D. C. Sharma, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 31 August 1954, p. 706.

3. G. H. Deshpande, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 31 August 1954, pp. 672–73.

4. For the first time the 1911 Census contained three sub-categories under the denomination 'Hindu': Hindus; Animists and Tribals, and the Depressed Classes or Untouchables. At the First Round Table Conference in 1931, Ambedkar and Raobahadur Srinivasan argued that the term 'non caste' or 'non-conformist Hindus' was more appropriate than the insulting term 'Depressed Classes'. However, the term was used until the current terminology of Scheduled Castes came into effect in 1935.

5. Supplementary Written Statement of B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* [hereafter *BAWS*], volume 1.

6. 'Evidence before Southborough Committee', *BAWS*, vol. 1, p. 270.

7. Ambedkar was labelled a 'British stooge' for agreeing to be a member of the Bombay Committee of the Simon Commission, which was boycotted by Congress and the Muslim League. He eventually submitted a book-length rejoinder criticising the Simon Commission's recommendations. See *Indian Statutory Commission*, vol. III Appendix D, pp. 87–156.

8. Evidence of Dr. Ambedkar before the Indian Statutory Commission on 23 October 1928, *BAWS*, vol. 2, p. 465.

9. Statement concerning safeguards for the protection of interests of the Depressed Classes as a minority in the Bombay Presidency and the changes in

the composition of and the guarantees from the Bombay Legislative Council necessary to ensure the same under Provincial Autonomy, submitted by B. R. Ambedkar on behalf of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Depressed Classes Institute) to the Indian Statutory Commission, 29 May 1928, *BAWS*, vol. 2, pp. 438–39.

10. A Report on the Constitution of the Government of Bombay Presidency, presented to the Indian Statutory Commission, *BAWS*, vol. 2, p. 320.

11. Ibid., p. 319.

12. Evidence of Dr Ambedkar before the Indian Statutory Commission on 23 October 1928, *BAWS*, vol. 2, p. 465. Ambedkar also submitted his own report to the (Simon) Indian Statutory Commission (Vol. III, Appendix D, pp. 87–156).

13. 'The Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables', *BAWS*, vol. 10, p. 539.

14. This offer was made in the immediate aftermath of the Cripps Mission of March 1942. Linlithgow was antagonistic to Sir Stafford Cripps and threatened to resign when Cripps went off on his Mission to India in March 1942. It is likely that Linlithgow's position reflected broader tensions within the British political establishment.

15. 'The Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables', p. 538.

16. Sir Stafford Cripps was a left-wing politician in Winston Churchill's War Cabinet who came to India in March 1942, and offered Indian leaders Dominion status after the war and eventual political independence if India supported the British war effort. Congress stopped talks with the Mission and began the massive Quit India Movement after the demand for immediate self-rule was not met.

17. Address by the President Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj, 'Report of the Proceedings of the Third Session of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference', *Held at Nagpur on July 18 and 19, 1942*. Address by the President Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj, p. 24.

18. 'Report of the Proceedings of the Third Season of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference', Nagpur, 18–19 July 1942. A Conference of the *Samata Sainik Dal* was held on 20 July, as well as the second session of the All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference.

19. Address by the President Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj, 'Report of the Proceedings of the Third Season of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference', Nagpur, 18–19 July 1942, p. 24.

20. Address by B. R. Ambedkar, 'Report of the Proceedings of the Third Season of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference', Nagpur, 18–19 July 1942, pp. 31–32.

21. Ibid., pp. 32–33.

22. *Pakistan, or the Partition of India*, BAWS, vol. 8.

23. 'Report of the Proceedings of the AIDC Conference', p. 5. The demand arose again in on 23 September 1944 at a meeting of the Working Committee of the AISCF in Bombay.

24. Office bearers of the Executive Committee had to pay an annual fee of Rs 10, while members of the village, *taluka* and district committee paid Rs 5/annum. *AISCF Constitution*, January 1955.

25. *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 March 1932.

26. Important Chambhar leaders in western India supported the Rajah–Moonje Pact, suggesting the growing conflict between Mahar Ambedkarites and Chambhar supporters of the Congress. The famous cricketer P. Balu joined the Congress during this period, as did N. S. Kajrolkar. P. N. Rajbhoj, who played an important role in the Mahad and Nasik *satyagrahas*, embraced Gandhian politics by 1932 and supported the Rajah–Moonje Pact. Finally, G. M. Thaware, a Mahar leader from Vidarbha and Assistant General Secretary of the All-India Depressed Classes Association, who initially supported a demand for separate electorates, now criticised Ambedkar's stance (Thaware 1932).

27. The Shimla discussion, held between 25 June and 14 July 1945 was organised by Lord Wavell, Viceroy for India, to consider the shape of a 'transitional Government at the Centre representative of the main political parties', namely, the Congress and Muslim League (Mansergh 1970–83, V: 39).

28. Zelliot (2004: 198) suggests that Ambedkar's political duties as Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council might have caused him to neglect preparing his political party for the 1946 elections. The SCF polled higher than the Congress in primaries in Madras, Bombay and the Central Provinces, yet the Federation was soundly defeated during the 1946 elections, losing all 15 reserved seats in Bombay, 14 to the Congress and one to an Independent candidate. This mattered because election results were the basis for participation in the Constituent Assembly. Again, in 1948, Ambedkar lost a bid for election to the Constituent Assembly from Bombay to a Congress Chambhar candidate, Kajrolkar, and in 1952, lost a seat in the Lok Sabha to another Congress Chambhar candidate, N. S. Kajrolkar. Thus at a crucial political point, the Scheduled Castes found themselves without independent representation in the Constitution-making body and lacked crucial input into the structure of the national state. Ramnarayan Rawat's painstaking analysis of the historic 1946 election results confirms Ambedkar's critique of the Poona Pact in almost every detail: the two-tier structure of electing Scheduled Caste candidates worked almost always to the advantage of Congress (Rawat 2003).

29. Qualifications for Scheduled Caste voters had been reduced to include literacy or previous performance of inferior village servant duties. Government

of India Bill, *Instruments of Instructions to the Governor-General and Governors*, 1935 (Zelliot 2004: 188).

30. Lani Guinier has made a similar point about cumulative voting in the contemporary United States. Accepting group interests as integral to the democratic process, Guinier argues that racist societies experience 'qualitative vote dilution' due to the focus on the one person-one vote principle (1994: 7). As an antidote, Guinier suggests a system of cumulative voting where 'voters get the same number of votes as there are seats or options to vote for, and they can then distribute their votes in any combination to reflect their preference' (ibid.).

31. Omvedt (1994: 182–83) notes that between 1937 and 1940, communists began supporting the Congress, withdrawing support from Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party and Periyar's Self-Respect movement in the Tamil country. By 1948, the Communist Party of India's 'Political Thesis' described Ambedkar as an anti-national separatist and a pro-British opportunist. During the 1952 elections, Nehru was especially virulent in his criticism of Ambedkar and the Scheduled Caste Federation as 'communal' (Venkatarangaiya 1953: 32–34, 37).

32. *Lord's Debate on India: Text of Secretary of State's Speech*, GI, Home (Political), No. 51/2/1946, NAI. Cited in the important essay by Bandyopadhyay (2000).

33. *Balaji v. State of Mysore* was one of the first cases in which caste came to be defined in this dual manner. *All India Reporter* (hereafter AIR) 1963, *Supreme Court Cases* (hereafter S.C.) 649.

34. The Constituent Assembly Debates record encounters where Ambedkar's caste identity is either addressed directly, or through circumlocution.

35. This is not the place to undertake a careful reading of Ambedkar's role in the Constituent Assembly whether in the Minorities Committee of which he was a part, his remarkable erudition on the topic of comparative constitutionalism, or his interventions in the Drafting Committee. For an argument about Ambedkar's centrality to India's constitutional vision, see Jaffrelot (2005: 106–18).

36. An important case challenging Article 17 via Article 26 is *Chinamma v. D. P. I.*, AIR 1964 Andhra Pradesh 277. For judgments arguing that Article 26 permits excommunication rights, see: *Chinamma v. D. P. I.*, AIR 1964 Andhra Pradesh 277; *Venkataramana Devaru v. State of Mysore*, AIR 1958 S.C. 255; *Sarup Singh v. State of Punjab*, AIR 1959 S. C. 860, and *Saifuddin v. State of Bombay*, AIR 1962, S.C. 853 (869, 873, 875).

37. In *Sangannagonda v. Kallangonda*, AIR 1960 Mysore 147, the court held that assigning *varna* status to individuals is neither religious discrimination nor denial of equal rights.

38. Early cases, such as *State of Kerala v. N. M. Thomas*, interpreted the equal opportunity intent behind a system of reservations to also require 'equality of result' where the free and fair play of market forces obtains. *State of Kerala v. N. M. Thomas*, AIR 1976 SC 490 (from *ILR* (1974) 1 Kerala 549.

39. Elsewhere I have argued that affirmative action policy and atrocities legislation have together enabled a re-politicisation of the political field, and addressed the ambivalent effects and paradoxical consequences of such measures for the project of caste annihilation and social equality. See Rao (2009), especially chapters 4, 6 and 7.

40. 'Mahad Yethil Dharmasangar va Varishta Hinduna Jababdari' (The Religious War at Mahad and Caste Hindu's Responsibility), *Bahishkrit Bharat*, editorial, 22 April 1927. Ambedkar long maintained that Dalits were caught between Marathas, immediate rural oppressors, and Brahmin nationalist allies against Marathas whose commitment to caste reform was questionable. His experience of Brahmin and upper-caste communist leaders had revealed a resistance to organising around caste even when they were sympathetic to exploitation of caste-labour.

41. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, 'Samyukta Maharashtra Samitice Dusre Adiveshan', 14–16 October 1960. The 1957 alliance was effective, winning the RPI national, state and local seats. See Lal (1988).

42. *Prabuddha Bharat*, 14 April 1959 contains the RPI manifesto written by Shankarrao Kharat, one-time Vice Chancellor of Marathwada University. N. Shivraj's speech, reported in *Prabuddha Bharat*, 16 May 1959.

43. B. K. Gaikwad, or Dadasaheb Gaikwad (1902–71), was moderately educated, came from a rural background, and led the Nasik *satyagraha*. Described by Ambedkar as his 'right hand', and a man of '24 carat gold', Gaikwad was the *de facto* leader of the RPI. Until he split from the RPI in 1960, R. D. Bhandare, who had been active with the Municipal Workers' Union in the 1930s, worked with communists and Socialists in Bombay to organise mill labour. Barrister Khobragade, who broke away in 1974, had organized *bidi* workers in Nagpur. For biographies of Gaikwad, see Bhargave (1968); Jadhav (1961); Shinde (2002).

44. Such antagonism hides the fact that the majority of Scheduled Caste government employees occupy the lowest rungs of bureaucracy while better positions remain vacant. For an important all-India evaluation of Scheduled Castes employment, see Jaffrelot (2002a). For studies of Maharashtra-focused studies of social mobility, see Deshpande (1978); Gare and Shirubhau (1973); Gawai (1981); Pandit (1973); Patwardhan (1973); Sachidananda (1976); Vasant Sathe, 'Buddha Zhala Mahar'.

45. The BSP in north India has managed to buck this trend but only through relentless, perhaps opportunistic coalition-building, including with the Hindu nationalist BJP. In addition, there is a higher concentration of

Chamars in north India than of Mahars in Maharashtra. *The Chamcha Age* (1984) by Kanshi Ram, relates the failure of Dalit politics to the Poona Pact. For important studies of the BSP, see Chandra (2004); Jaffrelot (2002a); Pai (2002).

46. For every Rs 100 earned, members were to pay annual dues of Re 1, of which Rs 0.50 was sent to the central body treasurer, Rs 0.25 to the district, Rs 0.13 to the sub-district office, and Rs 0.12 to the *chavani*. *Dalit Pantherchi Ghatana ani Karyakram* (Panther's Constitution and Activities).

47. From the start the Sena's neighbourhood units, called *shakhas* (branches), politicised through religious festivals such as the *Ganeshotsav* and the *Shivaji Jayanti* as well as through an extensive financial infrastructure and allied patronage networks with petty traders, businessmen, and local politicians. On the Sena, see Eckert (2003); Gupta (1997); Hansen (2001); Katzenstein (1979); Lele (1995).

48. By 1974, Raja Dhale told a scholar of the Dalit Panthers, there were 1,000 registered Panthers in each *taluka*, and 200,000 members spread across 75 *chavanis* in Bombay (Murugkar 1991: 79).

49. Statistics are hard to come by, but youth supported the Panthers, and their parents the RPI. There was support for Panthers' assertive displays even when Dalits were critical of their organisational anarchy or uncomfortable with their vitriolic speech.

50. 'Dalit Pantherchi Bhumika' (The Dalit Panthers' Perspective), in Dangle (1978).

51. Ibid., p. 5.

52. Vasant Dhamankar, 'Report on Gair Republican Pudhari, Bichari Paddalit Janata, Ani Dalit Panther [with a Foreword by Raja Dhale]', 1974; Corrupt Republican Leaders, Unfortunate Oppressed Dalits, and the Dalit Panthers (This was published in response to B. C. Kamble, 'Report on Republican Paksha-Aikya, Tikakarana Uttara, Mhanje Bharatiya Rajkaranaca Dhavatha Adhava', [7]).

53. Ibid., p. 5.

54. The Buddhist population went from 141,426 in the 1951 Census to 3,206,142 in 1961.

55. *Prabuddha Bharat*, 29 June 1957 (noted in Gokhale-Turner 1980).

56. Non-Mahar Dalits of Congress persuasion, P. N. Rajbhoj, Narayan Kajrolkar and Jagjivan Ram, opposed reservations for Buddhists.

57. This double bind arose in two major cases involving the right of Buddhist candidates to be elected to reserved seats, *Karwadi v. Shambharkar* (1958) and *Ganpat v. Presiding Officer* (1975). Both cases illustrated the difficulties of proving public conversion to Buddhism and distinguishing Buddhist practices from the range of sectarian differences accommodated under the legal banner of Hinduism. If conversion was proved, as happened

in *Punjabrao v. Meshram* (1964), candidates lost the right to constitutional safeguards and protections.

58. Anon., 'Bauddha Houn Maharac Rahile', n.d..

59. The Government of India admitted Buddhists into the Scheduled Castes Order in 1990. *Times of India*, 8 May 1990.

60. *Blitz* carried news of the Panther split on 20 July 1974; followed by *Maratha* on 23 July 1974.

61. Dhasal slowly moved away from support for Marxism. He supported Indira Gandhi during the Emergency years (1975–77), embracing her brand of authoritarian populism and more recently allied with the Shiv Sena.

62. A clever play on words: *The Determined Communist: Egotistical or Dedicated*. There is a subtle difference between *eknishta*, used ironically to mean arrant or extreme, and *eknishtaa* which means determined. The slight distinction plays on the difference between commitment to a cause and self-serving politics.

63. Vasant Dhamankar, *Gair Republican Pudhari, Bichari Paddalit Janata, ani Dalit Panther* (1974)

64. Dhale and Dhasal were initially associated with communists and socialists, respectively. Many scholars and activists associated with the Left believed that the Panthers radicalised Dalit politics with their 'total critique' and that 'If there had been an autonomous, grass-roots Dalit leadership, then the seeds of revolution would have sprouted amongst the Panthers' (Omvedt 1979: 58).

CHAPTER 11

# The Assassination of Gandhi and the Early Signs of Crisis of Muslim Nationalism in East Bengal

A. H. Ahmed Kamal

> Known as nationalism, its function has historically been to promote and perpetuate one of the most powerful cults of our time—the cult of mourning. (Guha 1998)

## INTRODUCTION

It is still a daunting task for historians of Pakistani nationalism to explain why the Muslim League declined so quickly, in less than seven years after Partition, in East Pakistan polity.[1] Not only the party that legitimately claimed the credit of winning a homeland for the Muslims in East Bengal disappeared from the political stage, the nation itself fell apart in less than two and a half decades (Jahan 1973; Kamal 1989; Ziring 1962). To many Pakistani nationalist historians, the imagining of Muslim nationalism was unproblematic and unidimensional especially in East Bengal—the region inhabited by a Muslim majority, economically exploited and socially oppressed by the upper-caste Hindus whose political platform was the Indian National Congress led by Gandhi.

A separatist politics, encouraged by the British, adopted and pursued by the Muslim elite of Bengal and northern India, matured in the process of voicing constitutional guarantee for the Muslim minority. The political cohesiveness and solidarity among different social classes of Muslims were formed by Jinnah's strategic manoeuvres within the quasi-liberal space of colonial politics. The response by

Gandhi, Nehru and Patel to Jinnah's political moves landed them in the *cul de sac* of no return without accepting the two-nation theory leading to the creation of two nation-states (Jalal 1985). Exactly that happened, and India and the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal had to be partitioned. This story is well known to the students of South Asian history.

The other outcome of the two-nation theory, that is, the emergence of Bangladesh has a story line also. The difficulty with that story is its failure to locate the inaugural moment of the change in the way the community was imagined. In the genre of nationalist history, the movement for the recognition of Bengali as the state language is considered to be the birth moment of the second coming of nationalism among the people of East Bengal (Umar 2004b: 224). The incident of police firing on the students and masses on 21 February 1952, celebrated as Language Martyrs' Day since then, is the most important landmark in the historiography of Bengali nationalism.

This essay is an attempt to problematise the accepted historiography of Bengali nationalism in erstwhile East Pakistan. The incident of the assassination of Gandhi, by itself historical in a different historiography of the failure of the Indian nation to come to its own, is also a milestone, we will argue, in the Bengali nationalist historiography. The incident by evoking widespread mourning among members of both the nations succeeds in laying the foundation stone of a bridge between the two bitterly contesting nationalisms in South Asia. Gandhi's death not only complicated Muslim nationalists' assessment of him but also exposed the internal conflict of Muslim nationalism in East Bengal. In this essay, we will attempt to historicise the incident in order to locate the internal contradictions Gandhi's death exposed in the body politic of Muslim nationalism in East Bengal.

## THE ASSASSINATION OF GANDHI

On 30 January 1948, while he was walking slowly from Birla House in Delhi, to attend a prayer, Gandhi, 78 years 3 months 28 days old on that day, was killed by an assassin in New Delhi (Eye Witness to History 2005). The hour of occurrence was 5.45 pm in the First Information of a cognisable crime under section 154, CPC in the case no. 68 reported in the Tughlak Road police station of the Central district, New Delhi. Shri Nand Lal Mehta, son of Shri Natha Lal Mehta, an Indian, who lived in M-Block, Building Lala Sarju Prasad at Connaught Circus in New Delhi, filed the following FIR:

> Today I was present at Birla House. Around ten minutes past five in the evening, Mahatma Gandhi left his room in Birla House for the Prayer Ground. Sister Abha Gandhi and Sister Sanno Gandhi were accompanying him. Mahatma was walking with his hands on the shoulders of the two sisters. Two more girls were there in the group. I along with Lala Brij Kishan, a silver merchant, resident of No. 1, Narendra Place, Parliament Street and Sardar Gurbachan Singh, resident of Timar Pur, Delhi were also there. Apart from us, women from the Birla household and two-three members of the staff were also present. Having crossed the garden, Mahatma climbed the concrete steps towards the prayer place. People were standing on both the sides and approximately three feet of vacant space was left for the Mahatma to pass through. As per the custom the Mahatma greeted the people with folded hands. He had barely covered six or seven steps when a person whose name I learnt later as Narayan Vinayak Godse, resident of Poona, stepped closer and fired three shots from a pistol at the Mahatma from barely 2 / 3 feet distance which hit the Mahatma in his stomach and chest and blood started flowing. Mahatmaji fell backwards, uttering “Raam – Raam”. The assailant was apprehended on the spot with the weapon. The Mahatma was carried away in an unconscious state towards the residential unit of the Birla House where he passed away instantly and the police took away the assailant.[2]

Having received the information a Police officer rushed to Birla House to find the dead body of the Mahatma at room no. 3, where he met Shri Nand Lal Mehta and recorded his statement. It was a case of Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code. The FIR in the Delhi Police station recorded that Gandhi was shot at 5.10 pm, while it was 5.12 pm by the eyewitness American reporter Sheean’s watch (Eye Witness to History 2005). According to Jan Oberg, Director, Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research (TFF), New Delhi, Gandhi spent 144 days in Birla House before being shot by Nathuram Godse, Bombay’s Marathi editor of the *Hindu Rastra* and a Hindu radical with links to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS), who held Gandhi responsible for weakening India by insisting upon a payment to Pakistan (Rs 55 crore, approximately 40 million pounds).

## THE MEASURE OF THE TRAGEDY

Gandhi's death was a tragic event of a huge magnitude which shocked the world to attention. Sheean wrote in his eye witness account, 'Just an old man in a loin cloth in distant India; yet when he died humanity wept' (ibid.). That evening after Gandhi was murdered the entire population of India was heart-broken by this dastardly act. Nehru in his Radio Speech on 30 January told the world that, 'The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. . . . We will not run to him for advice or seek solace from him'.[3]

Let me state at the outset that any evaluation of Gandhi is not so easy, if not impossible. Gandhi's long political life, his struggle against racism and imperialism, his thoughts on Indian social reconstruction, his rejection of modern technology, his efforts at nation-building in modern India by reemploying traditional Hindu religion, his stand for the Muslims after Partition, last but not the least, his political compromises with imperialism, do not allow analysts of his non-violent politics to arrive at any final decision about his political ideology. Radical politics often mentioned him as a reactionary and many on the left believed it (Karim 1992: 260). On the other hand, his political followers accepted him as 'Mahatma'—the title which was given on 21 January 1915 by Nautamlal Bhagavanji Mehta at the Kamribai School in Jetpur, Gujarat.[4] To many Harijans and poor peasants, Gandhi was God's incarnation on earth. He was the Hindu god, Rama, in the Kali Yuga—an age full of sins. Indeed, the difficulty of comprehending Gandhi becomes apparent by a statement of his closest political disciple Jawaharlal Nehru, the most outstanding of the founding fathers of modern India, who once wrote that he did not give much importance to Gandhi's writings on Swaraj but found it difficult to explain Gandhi's acceptability among millions of Indian peasants.[5] Indian historians are continuously trying to find out how that happened. The Subaltern historian Shahid Amin unravelled to a large extent the complexity of understanding Gandhi in his article 'Gandhi as Mahatma' in the third volume of Subaltern Studies (Amin

1984). Those who are familiar with the nationalist struggle against the British are also aware of Gandhi's deep influence and importance in Indian politics. Although it is true that he could not prevent the outcome of communal politics for which he is often blamed by historians like Ayesha Jalal who holds him responsible for not sharing power with the Muslims and thus hastening the partition of India. When the British left, India was divided into two sovereign nation-states—one with a Hindu majority and the other with the Muslim.

It cannot be said that Gandhi's political ideology was always very acceptable to the Indian Muslims, but the latter, especially the activists and the leaders among them, did not have the same opinion about Gandhi. The divergence of opinion regarding Gandhi among Muslim politicians became much sharper after his assassination.

Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947. Bengal was divided and East Bengal morphed into East Pakistan and the Muslim League took control of the newly created nation-state. While they were carrying out the task of nation-building, the Muslim League activists were bubbling with zeal. But all of them were not unanimous about their project and it came out clearly on that fateful day of 30 January 1948.

## MUSLIM NATIONALIST REACTIONS

This essay attempts to address the complexity of East Bengal Muslim nationalist politics by looking at the kaleidoscope of reaction on Gandhi's death. The way Muslim leaders registered their reactions, I argue, contained the seeds of decline of Muslim nationalism in East Bengal. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the undisputed leader of the Muslims, in his condolence message at Gandhi's death, published on 31 January in the *Dawn* published from Karachi, said that, 'Whatever our political differences, he was one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community and a leader who commanded their universal confidence and respect'. On the basis of this statement Abul Mansur Ahmad, the then editor of weekly *Ittehad* published from Calcutta, in his memoir quoted Jinnah having said on Gandhi's death that, 'India has lost a great Hindu' (Ahmad 1999: 221). Acknowledging that, 'There can be no controversy in the face of death', Jinnah did not concede an inch, even after Gandhi's death, from asserting that Gandhi was the leader of the Hindus, the political position Jinnah held all his life.[6] Jinnah failed to reconcile politically even with an assassinated Gandhi. Though the immediate reason for Gandhi's death was his effort to save Pakistan from financial ruin by exerting moral pressure, through a fast unto death, on the Indian government to deliver to Pakistan the withheld amount of Rs 55 crore on account of the division of assets shortly after partition (Ahmad 1999: 219; Ahmad 1975, II: 109–10). Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, in his statement said that, 'He was a great figure of our times and was trying unceasingly to bring back sanity to the people and to establish communal harmony. . . . His recent efforts for communal harmony will be remembered with gratitude'. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Premier of East Bengal, said that, 'The greatest tragedy is that when Mahatma Gandhi was most needed he has been taken away from us'.[7] Both of them realised the importance of Gandhi's mission after Independence and unhesitatingly acknowledged his greatness with the risk of differing with their leader. On the other hand, the last Muslim prime minister of undivided Bengal, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardi, then living in Kolkata carrying out Gandhi's mission of establishing communal harmony, made an emotionally charged statement, 'Weep India weep, if you have tears, shed them now' (Ahmad 1975, II: 110).

The leaders of the official Muslim League in East Bengal were no different in raising Gandhi, in their condolence messages, on a pedestal overlooking the complex and at times incomprehensible nature of latter's politics. A. K. Fazlul Huq, the most important among them, ousted by Jinnah in the Bengal Muslim League politics and now satisfied with the job of an Attorney General in the provincial High Court, made a reference before the Chief Justice and other Judges. He said that 'the historians of the future would place Gandhi amongst the greatest of the great men of the world'. On the other hand Nurul Amin, the senior-most member of the East Bengal Cabinet raised a question in his statement, 'Who could dream that this apostle of peace and true protector of rights of minorities would be the first victim of independence'?[8] Excepting Jinnah all of them highlighted the role of Gandhi in establishing communal harmony between the two communities of the Hindus and the Muslims after Partition. All of them, great leaders with large political following in East Bengal, believed that in those turbulent time of barbaric communal strife Gandhi was the only saviour of the Muslims. However, they did not look back to re-examine the politics they had pursued and the outcome of which was the partition of India, so, all these hyperboles, one could argue, did not look like they went beyond diplomatic niceties.

Now I will try to develop my argument by quoting the reactions of young Muslim nationalists of East Bengal. First, I am going to cite the reaction on Gandhi's death by young Tajuddin Ahmed, who as a Muslim nationalist took active part in the Pakistan movement since 1943 and little over two decades later after Partition became the first prime minister of the exiled government of Bangladesh in 1971. One does not know if Tajuddin had ever met Gandhi who stayed in Noakhali, an East Bengal district, from 7 November to 2 March in 1947. Walking barefoot Gandhi covered 116 miles, visiting 47 villages 'cursed by blood and bitterness', during the communal carnage there which followed the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946 (Das 2004; Collins and Lapierre 1976). Politicians of various stature, newspaper correspondents, Gandhi's disciples and Congress volunteers, Muslim League supporters rushed to Noakhali. But none of the young Muslim nationalists, including Tajuddin, whom we mention in this essay, visited Gandhi in Noakhali. But there was an instant and extensive reaction that we read in Tajuddin's diary written hours after he received the news of Gandhi's assassination. Grief overwhelmed him and abundantly flowed in the pages of his diary.[9]

Expression of grief has no necessary correspondence with language. Silence, crying, hurting oneself, even hitting others are the known modes of expression of grief among the people. Expression of grief often is loud and episodic remembrance, interrupted by outbursts of cries, of all the lost moments of happiness and unfulfilled desires involving the deceased. The reason and subject of grief often determine the mode of expression of mourning. But when grief is expressed through writing, the subject and object of grief merge in a text that opens up multiple possibilities of interpretations. Thus a written text expressing grief is always both private and public with the potentiality of entering into the domain of historical discourse. Through mourning Tajuddin was not only connecting with his political past, he, in fact, questioned the long-held basis of his anti-Gandhi public stand. Tajuddin's grief thus opens up the possibility of reversing or re-establishing his relationship with a martyred Gandhi in a fresh review of politics. To do this, the only mode he adopts which is sustainable is to express his grief in writing. Thus inscribed in the pages of his diary, his grief transcends the boundary of the private and enters into the domain of the public where politics determines the language of his grief, especially so, when it is all about Gandhi.

Tajuddin's diary entry on Gandhi's death, which was about three and half pages, was much longer than his entry of any other day including even 15 August, the Day of Independence from the British. From this, the intensity of pain that Gandhi's death inflicted on him becomes clear. He titled his diary page on 30 January as 'Sad day (Friday)-Sad news'. His first reaction after hearing the news was, 'I was puzzled for about 3 minutes I remained in nervousness-at the first utterance of news a peculiar harsh cry-like voice came out. . . .' To make sense of the impact of Gandhi's death, Tajuddin mentioned that he took his father's and brother's death very normally, but he became very heartbroken with Gandhi's death. He further wrote that, '. . . for the first time I got shock from human death which I always take for very usual thing to happen. To me death is a common and natural thing. I never mourn any body's death'. When his father died in 1947, only a few days short of a year before Gandhi's death, Tajuddin was in Calcutta and had his 'normal' dinner after receiving his father's death news. The following night he went on to have a 'sound sleep' at his village home 'in the very place where [his father] breathed his last'. But he could not sleep after receiving the news of Gandhi's death. He mentioned his calmness after his father's death and wrote that he ate four *parathas* and one bowl of meat only 15 minutes after receiving his father's death news.

> But the case is different with me at the death of Gandhiji. I wanted to shake off the melancholy in me as weakness. I took my night meal at 12 p.m. . . . But I could not sleep well against my will. While I was awake I was [absorbed] in Gandhiji, when slumber caught me due to numbness it took me to Gandhiji.

Tajuddin uses the examples of personal loss to measure the intensity of his mourning in the absence of any other measure. In his diary, he mentions Gandhi as a 'Great sage'.

He recorded a detailed description of Gandhi's last journey,

> At 11.45 a.m. (IST) Mahatma's body was taken out from Birla Bhaban in procession. The cortege was carried by military personnel because

> the funeral was declared a 'State funeral'. At 4-20 p.m. the Bier reached Rajghat on Jamuna. At 4-30 p.m. the body was placed on the pyre with head at the north. Devadas Gandhi placed over his body a pile of sandal wood. Ramdas Gandhi lit the pyre at 4-55 p.m. At 5 p.m. Mahatma's remains became ashes. Pandit Ramdhan Sharma read mantras. . . .

Tajuddin's attention to details of the last rites is not only striking but is a testimony to his emotional involvement with Gandhi. He further recorded, 'Pyre was provided with 15 maunds of Sandal wood, 4 maunds of ghee [clarified butter], 2 maunds of incense, 1 maund [of] coconut and 15 seers [of] camphor'.

His emotional state comes out strikingly when he writes about himself. This Tajuddin who even used cosmetics on Muharram day (a day of mourning for the Muslims) because he '. . . did not believe in that sort of expression of grief', after Gandhi's death his only luxury was to comb his hair, which he did not do properly for two days and he 'did not take bath for 48 hours'. These he did 'from [an] inner urge and out of forgetfulness'. All these suggest that he was deeply grief-stricken, but why? He himself explained.

Though he opposed Gandhi for political reasons, Gandhi's great personality diminished his opposition and produced a sense of guilt in Tajuddin. Affected by excessive guilt, he wrote that with the death of Gandhi the 'Sun declined and the beacon light of humanity declined too'. He compared Gandhi with the Pole Star and took resolution to follow the 'foot prints' of this great man and sought for his 'guidance'. Tajuddin could not withhold his reaction like Jinnah by saying only that he was 'the greatest Hindu'. Indeed, Tajuddin expressed his overwhelming grief through the pages of his diary.

Was Tajuddin the only person who reacted like this? Another Muslim nationalist, Kamruddin Ahmad wrote,

> . . . that night (30 January) I dreamt of Gandhiji in his Asram (hermitage), he was smiling showing his toothless gum and told that "future history will decide whether I am a hypocrite or not. I will certainly not stop going to Noakhali persuaded by you. When I decided to go there, at that time there was no riot in Bihar". We were dissatisfied and came out disgusted. But after waking up I realized that I did not apologize to him while he was alive. I will suffer and my conscience will bite me rest of my life.

This he wrote in his vernacular autobiography more than two decades and a half later (Ahmad 1975, II: 110). Kamruddin Ahmad's immediate reaction had been recorded by Tajuddin in his diary, 'Kamruddin sb[shaheb] came down at 8-30 p.m.—he was very much upset', wrote Tajuddin on the same day. While showing respect to Gandhi in his book *Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Panchash Bochor*, Abul Mansur Ahmad, the Muslim nationalist from Mymensingh, also criticised Jinnah's narrow-mindedness. He wrote that '. . . before that day I myself could not realize how much I loved Mahatma' (Ahmad 1999: 219). Badruddin Umar, then a young Muslim nationalist, was still in Calcutta at the time of Gandhi's death, recorded his feelings in his recent autobiography. He documented how Gandhi's death generated fears and sadness amongst the minority Muslims of West Bengal. Soon after, Umar's family left India to live in East Bengal (Umar 2004a: 182).

These reactions were not only confined to the elite politicians and activists, the people of Dhaka also deeply mourned Gandhi's death. On 2 February, the *Dawn* reported that,

> Dacca mourned Mahatma Gandhi's death by observing a complete *hartal*. Business was totally suspended, all Hindu and Muslim shops, bazaars, commercial houses, banks and educational institutions, offices and courts remaining closed. Pakistan flags were flown half mast on government buildings and other institutions. There was no vehicular traffic and even rickshaws and hackney carriages were not plying. . . . In the afternoon, a mile long procession of the Hindus and the Muslims with a life-size portrait of Gandhi silently paraded the six mile long route from Victoria Park to the Coronation Park, where a meeting was held and verses from the Bible, Quran and Gita were recited. The gathering of about 25,000 people observed two minutes silence for the peace of Mahatma Gandhi's soul.

Indeed, while condoling on the death of Gandhi, the Government of East Bengal announced through loudspeakers that the offices and courts including the University of Dacca would remain closed on Saturday (31 January).[10] Tajuddin wrote that the 'whole city observed Hartal (general strike)—an unprecedented scene for Dacca city. . . . Condolence procession went out . . . met in a condolence meeting . . . silent prayer and no speech'. Tajuddin did not fail to record the emotions of the people who were running around to get hold of newspapers. He wrote,

> People were rushing for [news]paper in such a way as was not seen even in the third class booking office of the cinema halls of Dacca-Man upon man, struggling the one, suffocating the other and trampling yet another was rushing forward to get at least a scrap of paper where in lay the news of [Gandhi's death] . . . within 1 hour no paper was available.

## CONCLUSION

But why were there such outbursts of passion and why this intensity? Though it is unbelievable that by January 1948 Muslims of East Bengal, even a large section of Muslim League activists, started losing faith on the leadership of the Muslim League, a valuable document of this loss of faith survived. It was *Purba Pakistaner Durbhaga Janashadharon* ('The Unfortunate People of East Pakistan') published by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Naimuddin Ahmed in the same month Gandhi died. This three-anna booklet for Muslim League activists of East Pakistan was the first record of disappointment and frustration about the Muslim League government of East Bengal (Rahman and Ahmed 1948). The excitement of achieving Pakistan started getting diminished among the activists of the Muslim League Workers' Camp, the emerging dissident group in the Muslim League, to which Tajuddin, Kamruddin and other young nationalists belonged. Abul Mansur Ahmad shared the resentment of the workers' camp while still living in Calcutta.

It will only be partially true if one argues that the reassessment of Gandhi became possible by the politically conscious section of the Muslim League because of their disillusionment with the League leadership which was tied especially to the Nawab family of Dhaka, the *Azad* editor Akram Khan and the business house of the Ispahanis—all suspected of serving the interest of the central government, neglecting that of East Bengal (Ahmad 1975, II: 21). In addition, the frustrations were exacerbated by the Punjabi and non-Bengali civil servants administering East Bengal (Zinkin 1962: 40). In fact, what added to their grievance was the sense of collective insecurity of the Indian

Muslims and the fear from the much too powerful neighbour pursuing the policy of *Akhand Bharat* after the British left India. In this context Gandhi was perceived to be the only shelter for the Muslims, especially in that riot-torn, hostile India where communal violence threatened the pursuance of any secular politics—the Congress's declared objective of nation-building. This became very clear to those who participated in politics during the Raj claiming the rights of Indian Muslims. After the partition of India, Gandhi arranged to return Pakistan's share of Rs 55 crores. Recognising Gandhi's greatness, Abul Mansur Ahmad wrote that, 'Gandhi saved lives of Muslims of Delhi and its outskirts by hunger strike only fifteen days before his death', for which he was killed by Nathuram Godse who held him responsible for protecting and safeguarding the Muslim interests (Ahmad 1999: 219). The *Azad*, the only vernacular daily till then published from Dhaka, in its editorial recognised the fact that his fast unto death in his frail health to save Muslim lives from the Hindu communalist attacks successfully turned the tide of communal tension in Delhi and made the Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims embrace each other in harmony.[11] Thus, Gandhi posed a huge question mark through his death to the nationalist Muslims of East Bengal. This extraordinarily tragic incident made the latter look small before Gandhi's greatness; they were all absorbed in guilt feelings.

Tajuddin wrote self-critically, 'In the past the same I spoke against this Great Soul for political achievement'. He confessed that he believed, as other Muslim nationalists did, that the only way to make the Muslim League powerful was by making the Congress weaker; and to undermine the Congress the easiest way was to undermine Mahatma who was the soul of that organisation. In his reactions, Tajuddin thus exposed the inability of somebody trained in colonial liberal politics to make sense of Gandhi's politics which derived its legitimacy from a particular reading of Hinduism—his experiment with truth, his politics of Ahimsa and finally his idea of Swaraj. Understandably, this reading was culturally and historically inaccessible to Tajuddin and others of his kind. Reviewing the past from the changed context of January1948, they could realise Gandhi's greatness considering the future safety of the Indian Muslims and the security of the Muslim homeland.

In less than a year of achieving a state for the Muslims, young nationalists like Tajuddin considered Gandhi as a 'hitherto unfelt beloved friend'. The perception of Gandhi's political role by Muslim nationalists changed after India was partitioned on communal basis. Previously, in their struggle for a separate homeland the Muslim nationalists perceived Gandhi as an obstacle to their political goal whereas the very homeland, when achieved, found in Gandhi the only friend who could not only save the land but also the Muslims abandoned to the mercy of the Hindu nationalists in independent India. At the core of his guilt-triggered grief in the pages of his diary, Tajuddin still remained a Muslim nationalist, but Gandhi's martyrdom raised the question of the minority rights much more vigorously in both nation-states, at least for the rights of one minority group young Muslim nationalists struggled for before the Partition.

Tajuddin's concern for the vulnerable members of his community in India, following Gandhi's 'foot prints' and 'guidance', would, in future, enable him to look beyond the boundary of the same community and redefine it to include others, the Hindus in East Bengal. In this, he would be guided by the magnanimity of a martyred Gandhi. But this would entail a redefining of the political community in East Pakistan: a shift from Muslims to a broader Bengali identity imagined in course of time by the linguistic resources of the community. The first spark of this identity was visible on 21 March 1948, less than two months after Gandhi's death, when the young Muslim nationalists of East Bengal shouted a loud 'no' to Jinnah's emphatic declaration for Urdu as the future state language of Pakistan (Umar 1970, I: 108). The demand for Bengali as one of the state languages led the young Muslim nationalists to gradually embrace cultural nationalism. Thus, the Tajuddins and Kamruddins of East Bengal crossed the threshold of religious communalism by inaugurating a politics which would go beyond this narrow communal boundaries and would usher in a politics that would promise to serve both the Hindus and Muslims of East Bengal—the beginning of 'secular politics' under the umbrella of the Awami League, the party that would years later lead to create a nation-state based on a constitution proclaiming secularism as one of its four fundamental principles.[12] Thus Gandhi's death that triggered a tension among the rank and file of the Muslim nationalists of East Bengal took more than two decades to resolve by imagining a different identity for the latter and realising it by giving a violent birth to a secular Bangladesh—a new nation-state.

## NOTES

1. East Bengal and East Pakistan have been used interchangeably in this essay.

2. http://www.kiranbedi.com (accessed on 12 December 2015).

3. Nehru's radio speech, All India Radio, New Delhi, 30 June 1948.

4. It is commonly believed that the title 'Mahatma' was accorded by Nobel Laureate Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (Dutta and Robinson 1997: 2).

5. I have lost the exact reference but I recall having read something close to the sense this statement carries.

6. *Daily Dawn*, Karachi, 31 January 1948.

7. Both the statements of Liaquat Ali Khan and Khawaja Najimuddin appeared in the *Dawn* on 31 January 1948, Karachi.

8. *Azad*, 31 January 1948, Dhaka.

9. See Tajuddin Ahmed's Diary in Umar (1984).

10. *Azad*, 31 January 1948, Dhaka.

11. The *Azad* editorial on 31 January 1948, Dhaka.

12. See Umar (2004b). The Awami Muslim League was founded on 23 June 1949. In 1955, by dropping 'Muslim', the party adopted a secular constitution.

CHAPTER 12

# Religion and Language in the Formation of Nationhood in Pakistan and Bangladesh

### Tanveer Fazal

In the wake of decolonisation, the newly liberated states of Pakistan and Bangladesh faced a precarious situation. While most of the colonies, owing to a variety of historical factors, had retained their 'multi-national character', the accepted maxim in the West on which they aspired to model their polity was 'one nation-one state'. Following the collapse of the monarchy and with it divinity as sole legitimiser of authority, cultural homogeneity or the isomorphism between state and society became the bedrock on which the sustenance of the former was believed to be guaranteed. Hence, the term 'nation-state' came into vogue despite the fact that the nation-state was only an 'aspiration', which could never be 'realised even in Western Europe' (Oommen 1997: 136). While the 'nation' was a cultural concept, the state was an embodiment of rational-political institutions.[1] And behind this thin veneer was hidden the project of drawing people's sentiments to the state so as to ensure their loyalties—lone and terminal.

The narrative of the triumph of the west European 'nation-states'—colonisation and industrialisation—was quite enticing for the decolonised and peripheral states in the non-Western world. The Western model offered them a state for their nascent 'nationalism', an idea they had already imbibed during their struggle for independence. It promised political coherence for the polyglot states, only if they could transcend traditional group loyalties in favour of an abstract sense of community called the nation. The received model sought to reconcile the centrifugal pulls of ethnic and primordial collectivities by instilling an idea of nationhood. Where the nation and the state were not coterminous, the push was towards constructing such coterminality. In other words, 'Project homogenisation', a term Oommen uses, quite pejoratively, was unleashed through a state-patronised and sponsored nationalism (1997: 135–37). For many, enthused by the Deutschian thesis of social mobilisation, this could most impressively be achieved through a solvent like modernisation. But as Sheth points out, '. . . the politics of social mobilisation, instead of being shaped by the state's modernising project proceeds from the existing relationships of power within the society' (1989: 626). This only strengthened the domination of the numerically dominant and politically entrenched over the structures of power. In their effort to create an appropriate phantasmagoria, the cultural moorings of the 'nation' came to be defined in terms of the symbols and ethos of the dominant group. This led to the 'ethnification' of weak and marginal national and ethnic groups.

Pakistan, comprising the territories of erstwhile British India, had at its shoulder the claim of separate nationhood by the Muslims of the subcontinent. The Muslim homeland itself underwent ruptures as its eastern half catapulting on a linguistic nationalism, shunned all its association with a religion-defined 'national identity'. Despite a near religious homogeneity in Pakistan, and a linguistic unity in Bangladesh, both the South Asian states have had a turbulent exercise in 'nationbuilding'. If religion in Pakistan has failed to subsume various bases of peoples' identifications, language in Bangladesh has created its own insiders and outsiders. A pertinent question that troubles social cognition then is how should nation be conceived and comprehended? Our effort in the following pages would be guided towards bringing forth the state's agenda of 'nation-building' and its cultural-ideological proclivities in the particular context of Pakistan and Bangladesh. In contraposition to the state-defined national agenda, the endeavour shall also be towards explicating the alternative notions of nation and its attributes, which will go a long way in interrogating the state-defined categories.

## PAKISTAN: THE STATE AND ITS IDEOLOGY

As the theory of 'two nations' culminated in the creation of the sovereign Muslim state, the same became the ideology in the nascent state for the purpose of legitimising political authority. 'Muslim nationalism', the *raison d'être* of Pakistan, was defined abhorring territorial nationalism, an antithesis to the 'universal community of faith' as idealised in the sacred texts. The notion of an all-encompassing 'Indian nation', embracing the entirety of the peoples and territories comprising British India, was repudiated. The 'Muslim nationalists', perceiving the threat of an imminent Hindu hegemony, popularised the notion of a distinct Muslim personality—universalistic in orientation and indistinguishable despite cultural, linguistic or territorial ties with those outside the faith. Iqbal, to whom is owed the ideological foundation of 'Muslim nationalism', while presenting the Indian Muslim personality specifically governed by Islamic ideals, was actually contesting the West and its exhortation of the binary opposition between the spiritual and the temporal. It was for this reason that Iqbal was derisive of 'western nationalism' for it prioritised peoples' loyalty to their fatherland over and above all other identifications.

> It is not the unity of language or country or the identity of economic interests that constitutes the basic principle of our nationality. It is because we all believe in a certain view of the universe . . . that we are members of the society founded by the Prophet of Islam. Islam abhors all material limitations, and bases its nationality on a purely abstract idea objectified in a potentially expansive group of concrete personalities. . . . In its essence it is non-temporal, nonspatial. (Cited in Syed 1979: 80–81)

Yet in its application to the political context, the ideological or spiritual nationhood of Iqbal was concretely linked to the claim over a separate homeland. And Jinnah, in his presidential address to the Lahore session of the League (1940), put it succinctly: 'Mussalmans are a nation . . . and they must have their homeland, their territory and their state' (1960: 57).

Pakistan as it emerged, post-Partition, was a state *sui generis*. The people inhabiting the newly carved out territories belonged to multiple speech communities and, ensconced in their respective customs and traditions, were even living in geographically non-contiguous territories. Pakistan had for its frontiers two isolated regions, situated at the far corners of the subcontinent with an intervening stretch of almost 1,500 kms of Indian territory. In terms of its ethnic or national composition it had Bengalis comprising the bulk of the eastern wing, with Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baluch placed in its western part. In retrospect, the demand for Pakistan was raised on behalf of the Indian Muslims in their entirety. Yet the creation of Pakistan foreclosed any neat equation between the demand and the reality. Well after Partition, millions of Hindus still lived in Pakistan and the 1951 Census recorded their numbers at as high as around 14 per cent, with the largest chunk residing in East Pakistan (Gankovsky and Polanskaya 1964: 97).

It was not that the architects of Pakistan missed the reality. The dilemmas that confronted the new state were delineated in an article written by a president of Pakistan:

> [Pakistani nationalism was] based more on an idea than any territorial definition. Till then ideologically we were Muslims, territorially we happened to be Indians and parochially we were conglomeration of at least eleven smaller provincial loyalties. But then Pakistan emerged as a reality, (we) were faced with the task of transforming all our traditional territorial and political loyalties into one great loyalty for the new State of Pakistan. (Ayub Khan, cited in Wilcox 1969: 347)

The decades following the establishment of Pakistan were marked by intense debates within the intelligentsia and amongst the political actors, so as to find a viable basis for the consolidation of the state and its people. Discerning the tension inherent in Pakistan's geographical and ideological frontiers, the pragmatist in Jinnah did a volte face invoking secularism and common citizenship rights as principles guiding state policy:

> You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed-that has nothing to do with the business of the state. (Jinnah n.d: 8–9)

Notwithstanding the founder's inclination for a secular polity, conflicting views came to the fore once the incipient state undertook the task of drafting its future constitution. The initial controversy began on the question of Islam's centrality, reminiscent of the old tension between the traditionalists and the modernists. Interestingly, barring a few secularists, the majority of the political leadership of the new state agreed that the morals and traditions of Islam should find some reflection in its laws and institutions. This consensus, however, faced a crisis once Islam's relationship with the modern state and its institutions came to be put in practice. The traditionalists, including the fundamentalists, negated any role to the 'human will' or 'human legislation', in favour of the discretion of the divine. The 'supreme sovereignty', it was held, rested in God alone; the 'state' could at most, 'administer the country as His agent' (Maududi, cited in Binder 1961: 102–03). The modernist version, on the other hand, was an apologist one, which stood for an ideal balance between divine restrictions and human freedom.

In the final analysis, none emerged victorious. The objectives resolution incorporating the principle on which the 'future Constitution was to be fashioned, was in effect a compromise accommodating both the contentions. It accepted the traditionalist position that the 'sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone, and the authority which He has delegated to the state of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust'. But in its assurance that 'the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed', the resolution also contained the modernist underpinnings (reproduced in Ahmad 1991: 219). The ambiguous wording of the resolution has remained a bone of contention down to the present day, thereby subjecting the Constitution to a continuous process of re-writing.

Issues of national identification continued to sharpen diversities of opinion in Pakistan. Linked to different worldviews they impinged on different modes of conceptualising the nation and its cognates. In a survey conducted in the late 1960s, Nasim Javed categorises his respondents under three heads: the 'Islamic nationalists', solely or prevalently identified with the confessional faith which was seen as the only real collective bond of the Muslims of Pakistan and elsewhere; diametrically opposed to them were the 'secular nationalists'; occupying the middle ground were 'Pak-Islamists' who reconciled the competing identities of 'territory' and religion (Javed 1974: 19–25). It was the latter formulation around which the Pakistani national identity came to be grounded. Consequently, Islam acquired the centrality that alone could fortify the state, at the same time making the nation an ineluctable part of the *millat* (religious community). As a prominent Pakistani politician argued,

> The spirit of Pakistan is Islam or if you prefer it, Muslim. That spirit has to be preserved. You can only cherish and safeguard it if . . . vehicles for the operation of the *millat* within the *qaum* (nation) are afforded and preserved. (Cited in Wilcox 1969: 347)

The 'official nationalism' attempted to fix and objectify an essentialised sense of 'Muslim identity'. The ideology of the state found its most ardent advocates in Punjabis who enjoyed monopoly over structures of state power, so much so that, the Punjabi identity fused into the identity of Pakistan. In this hegemonic project, the Muhajirs[2] joined as junior partners. Being a people uprooted from their native land, the theory of Muslim nationhood could alone provide the rationale for their continued existence in the new state. While the Muhajirs filled in the bureaucracy along with the Punjabis, the Punjabi domination in the military—a colonial legacy—remained unperturbed. Approximately 80 per cent of the army and 55 per cent of the federal bureaucracy were from the Punjab. The Muhajirs—3.5 per cent of the population—had a share of 21 per cent in the Pakistan Civil Services (Samad 1995: 28). Power, as inhered in the state, came to be monopolised between these two ethnic groups resulting in a highly centralised structure. It manifested itself through the domination of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy over the civilian-political authority.

Their domination in the field of culture was most evident when Urdu, historically the language of the Muslim nobility and, in Pakistan synonymous with Muhajir culture, was chosen to become the language of the state. Given the diversities in the linguistic and cultural association of the inhabitants, Urdu alone, it was believed, could realise a 'monolithic nation'. Notably, merely 2.4 million inhabitants spoke Urdu, yet the rationale was the rhetoric of Islam. As the state's first governor general sought to emphasise:

> The State language, therefore, must obviously be Urdu, a language that has been nurtured by a hundred million Muslims of the subcontinent, a language . . . which, more than any other provincial language, embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim

> tradition and is nearest to the language used in other Islamic countries. (Jinnah n.d.: 90)

Interestingly, those arguing for the pre-eminence of a supranational Islamic identity argued in favour of Arabic, for it was the 'language of Islam' which alone could bring in 'lingual unification of Muslims' as an 'integral part of their overall unification' (Matin 1954).

The triumphalist approach, while essentialising Islam as the sole determinant of a Muslim's predilections, simultaneously projected and reified a monolingual Islam. Scriptural Islam was idealised, at the cost of other social practices. President Ayub Khan's observations on Bengali Muslims' cultural practices smacks of such contempt: 'East Bengalis, who constitute the bulk of the population, probably belong to the very original Indian races . . . they have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence. As such they have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races' (1967: 187).

The ideology of the state was *de facto* a hegemonic project—a universal ideological enterprise that could conceal class and ethnic conflict. As Gramsci, clarifying the concept of hegemony, had noted, the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. While domination is actualised through the coercive machinery of the state, hegemony of ideas is objectified in and mainly exercised through civil society, the ensemble of educational, religious and associated Institutions (Gramsci 1973: 242, 259–65).[3] The state-aligned intellectual activity, through school textbooks and historical projects, have particularly concentrated on moulding cognitive structures.[4] Consequently, history is the biggest casualty as attempts are made to situate the yearning for Muslim nationhood in the medieval past. A Radio Pakistan broadcast thus declared:

> The foundations of Pakistan were laid with the arrival of the first Muslim in the subcontinent. Pakistan has at its back the historical heritage of a thousand years. The strength of Pakistan lies in the political, cultural and religious supremacy of the Muslims. . . . The people of Pakistan are firm in their belief in Islamic principles. (Cited in Nayyar 1972: 147)

Islam, in this sense, came to be deployed as an ideological apparatus so as to legitimise political authority. For the ruling clique, a flirtation with the idea of the Islamic state remained, primarily, an effort to superimpose an essential 'Muslimness' on its populace. This alone, it came to be believed, could sustain the Pakistani nation.

## CONTESTING HEGEMONY: RISE OF BENGALI NATIONALISM

No sooner was the new state established, than the ambiguously conceived 'Muslim nationalism' lost its contextual significance. Whereas the Muslims in British India carried with themselves myriad layers of identification—religious, linguistic, class—each historically contingent, it was a misconception on the part of the ideologues of Pakistan to assume a perpetually stable 'religious identity'. At the height of 'Muslim nationalism', the other bases of association had merged or were temporarily suspended so as to absolutise an overwhelming 'Muslimness' in their identity. This interface between religion and politics was not to remain the same in an obverse socio-political context. This was augmented by the Punjabi-Muhajir detente and its consequent concentration of power and essentialisation of culture. The severest jolt to the state's ideological enterprise was the emergence of nationality movements, particularly Bengali; where nation came to be conjured on the edifice of cultural-specificity, linguistic identity and a claim over the ethnically associated homeland.

In the case of the Bengali Muslims it marked a significant departure, as prior to Partition a large majority of them had been active campaigners in the League's acceptance of Islam as the sole definer of their personality. With the rise of a vernacular-oriented non-*ashraf* (noble by birth) intelligentsia, a new search for an identity had begun. This shift had shown strong under currents as early as in 1955; when Mujibur Rahman; in a speech in the Constituent Assembly, gave vent to his anxiety:

> Sir you will see that they want to place the word "East Pakistan" instead of "East Bengal". We have demanded so many times that you should make it Bengal (Pakistan). The word "Bengal" has a history, has a tradition of its own. You can change it only after the people have been consulted.[5]

With their roots in the eclectic culture of Bengal, the emerging intelligentsia came out against the hegemonic language of the state.

As against the idiom of Islam invoked in favour of the imposition of Urdu, the language movement, which shaped the formative phase of Bangla nationalism, questioned its validity: 'We refuse to believe that any language under heaven can be Islamic or Christian or Heathen' (cited in Murshid 1995: 303). Spearheaded by the students and the intelligentsia, the movement demanded parity of Bangla with that of Urdu as the language of the state. Though the demand was conceded, the fervour that it generated refused to die down.

The contest, however, was not confined to the arena of culture alone. Besides their subjective association with the Bangla language and culture, Bengali nationalism contained actual material ramifications for the Bengali speech community. While questioning the pre-eminence that Urdu enjoyed, they were, in effect, struggling against the imminent closure of power and opportunity that such a measure would inevitably have brought (Phadnis 1989: 168). In the context of the highly centralised garrison state structure of Pakistan, Bengali protagonists questioned internal colonialism dominant-subordinate relationship and inequity in the distribution of power within the society. Following Hechter, who sees 'internal colonialism'[6] as a situation in which 'the core' seeks 'to dominate the periphery politically and to exploit it materially' (1975: 9): the eastern wing could well qualify as a periphery colonised by the western wing. Though the imbalance between the two wings was a legacy inherited by the Pakistani state, the new regime could do little to set it right. Despite being a numerical majority (56 per cent), Bengali representation in the military elite remained a miniscule 5 per cent, whereas they could form only 30 per cent of the civil-bureaucratic elite (Jahan 1972: 24–26). Mujib's six-point demand named *Amader bachar dabi* (Our Right to Live), therefore, concentrated on measures such as regional autonomy, land reform, nationalisation of industries, to correct the unevenness embedded in Pakistani social and political structure.

Centred on language, Bangla nationalism inevitably came into conflict with the religion-specific Muslim/Pakistani identity. Until the mid-1960s, as a survey concludes, Bengali Muslims faced no fundamental conflict in their identification as Bengalis and simultaneously as Pakistanis (Schuman 1973). This tension between the pulls of religion and language is evident in the reflections of Abul Mansur Ahmad, a prominent politician of Pakistan. Contrary to the single symbol thrust in Bengali nationalism, he laid stress on multi-symbol congruence of language and religion in determining their national identity. His enthusiasm for Bengali had a strange slant; he favoured Pak-Bangla with heavy doses of Persian to serve as the distinct language of Bengal Muslims (Murshid 1995: 295).

This ambiguity dissipated as Bengali discontent culminated in mass Bengali nationalism leading to the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. 'Bengali' acquired a secular connotation emphasising the cultural dimension of identity. 'Pakistani', on the other hand, implied a continuing belief in the oppressive two-nation theory and in giving primacy to religion, subsuming all other identities. The works of Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore came to be celebrated. And in place of *Pakistan Zindabad*, *Jai Bangla* became the nationalist outcry (Phadnis 1989: 169).

## POST-1971 QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN PAKISTAN

The secession of the eastern wing had truncated Pakistan of a sizeable territory and reduced its population to about half its size. More so, the 'new Pakistan' that had remained was hardly an ethnically coherent formation. The insurmountable loss, however, was to the ideological edifice on which national identity was conceived. The Muslimness of their identity, which many among them for so long, had zealously guarded, lay shattered in history. 'The two-nation theory, formulated in the middle class living rooms of Uttar Pradesh, was buried in the Bengali countryside' (Ali 1983: 96). An event setting forth to a gradual realisation, as we shall see in the following pages, of bases of association, other than that informed by their religion. The situation purported to what Gramsci had called the 'crisis of hegemony', meaning whereby 'the ruling class has lost its consensus . . . i.e., . . . the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously' (1973: 275–76).

Consequently, post-dismemberment Pakistan was witness to a quest for ideological coherence and a national identity which could fuse the contending trends. The crisis, as many began to feel, could only be averted by a renewed commitment to Islam, the cornerstone of Pakistan. Pakistan of post-1971, was witness to a fervour in favour of Islamic idiom and symbols (Richter 1979). The group of leading

Pakistani historians who had met in Islamabad to explore the 'quest for identity' arrived at the same conclusion:

> . . . the wish to see the kingdom of God established in a Muslim territory . . . was the moving idea behind the demand for Pakistan, the cornerstone of the movement, the ideology of the people, and the raison d'etre' of the new nation-state. . . . If we let go the ideology of Islam, we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means. . . . If the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranians, but what do we remain if we give up Islam? (Cited in Richter 1979: 549)

Subsequently, Islam retained the pre-eminence in the state-defined 'national identity'. Ironically, what could have provided a basis to realise the futility of deploying religious symbols, instead came to be interpreted as implying that a digression from Islamic ideals and principles had been instrumental in bringing Pakistan to such a pass. Islam, we would argue, again acquired the status of ideology that, for the statists, could alone provide legitimate authority. This functional attribute of Islam was handy for both the regimes with modernist orientations as well as those with avowed commitment to the Islamic state.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan People's Party that had swept the polls in West Pakistan in the 1970 elections, had his political discourse anchored in socialism, decentralisation and restoration of democracy. While analysing the political developments leading to the cataclysmic events in the eastern wing, Bhutto had remained steadfast in his ideas blaming overarching centralisation and 'cold blooded exploitation of the people:

> The tragedy of Pakistan lies in the fact that . . . [it] has been a federation in name only. . . . The spirit of federalism and the rules of co-existence were sacrificed at the altar of ambition. In the name of 'strong centres' the power of the provinces were weakened to the point of being extinguished'. (Syed 1992: 18)

Despite his modernist inclinations, Bhutto continued to make liberal usage of Islamic idioms to draw a popular base for his political goals. Islamic socialism, the thrust in his political vocabulary was a curious admixture of Islam with populist slogans of *roti*, *kapda aur makan*. With his ascendance to power, the dissonance between theory and practice became explicit. As disillusionment with his populist rhetoric aggravated, he increasingly reverted to Islam.

Islamisation of the state and society became a professed aim as Zia-ul-haq staged a successful *coup d'état*. The theory of two-nations, the fulcrum on which Pakistan was realised, now needed to be coterminous with a theocratic state—an issue successfully avoided by the previous regimes. 'Pakistan', as Zia held, 'was created in the name of Islam' and would 'continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam' (Richter 1979: 555). The unprecedented Islamisation that followed to establish the ideal *Nizam-i-Mustaja* (the ideal governance delineated by the Prophet), was all-encompassing covering the totality of Pakistani life. As Pakistan proceeded to become a confessional state, nationhood came to be defined in terms of religious affiliations. All other cultural or ethnic ties had to be surrendered in favour of Islam, and thereof, to the state, failing which, disintegration would be the *fait accompli*. Zia tried to make this point by drawing an analogy from the Zionist state, Israel:

> Other than Israel, Pakistan is the only state created on religious grounds. We were created on the basis of islam. Look at Israel, its religion and its ideology are the main sources of its strength. We in Pakistan have lost sight of the importance of these things. And without them you're like straw being thrown about in the ocean. You're a Sindhi, a Baluch, a Punjabi, a Pathan. Pakistan's binding force has always been Islam. Without it, Pakistan would fall. (Cited in Wilder 1995: 67)

Consistent with this, Arabic, claimed as the language of the *ummah* (community of believers) by the Islamists, became obligatory along with Koranic and Islamic studies. Laws were enacted making jurisprudence consistent with the Shariah (Islamic law). The enforcement of *zakat*, *ushr* and *riba*—traditional Islamic taxation and trading norms—sought to make the Islamisation of human behaviour complete.

Notwithstanding the fact that the inconsistency of such an ideological offensive strikes the modern mind, the Islam which the state and its hegemonic apparatus sought to project suffered from contradictions from within the Islamic discourse. The 'scriptural

Islam' of the state either remained oblivious to other trends or such trends were declared antithetical to Islamic observances—the Ahmediyas[7] providing the glaring instance. In such a construction of national identity, the non-Muslims were definitely not to find a place, as was attempted through the system of separate electorates. The minorities have instead argued for a composite Pakistani nationhood, based on their equal claim to the homeland. As one Pakistani Christian laments, 'Is Pakistan not a nation? Then why separate electorates? . . . we do not consider ourselves to a separate people from Pakistanis just because of religion?' (Cited in Richter 1982: 147)

## THE CRITICALITY OF LANGUAGE AND TERRITORY IN PAKISTAN

Sociological insights in the study of nations, their formation and political articulation confirm the criticality of both language and territory as their objective foundations. Since nations are essentially cultural concepts, language is seen as the nucleus of culture. The speakers of the same language develop an immense common bond and with such an attachment they go back to a 'common store of social memories'. Joshua Fishplan has expressed this view strongly:

> . . . the essence of nationality is its spirit, its individuality, its soul. This soul is not only reflected and protected by the mother tongue but, in a sense, the mother tongue is itself an aspect of the soul, a part of the soul made manifest. (Cited in Karna 1998)

Moreover, for the nation to articulate and express itself, it has to be residing in a common territory often claimed as its ancestral homeland. The crucial significance of territory is illustrated by the fact that the 'loss of homeland invariably results in the loss of one's mother tongue' (Oommen 1997: 194).

Both language and its association with a distinct homeland gained salience as different ethnic groups—the Sindhis, the Pashtuns, the Baluchs and more recently, even the Muhajirs—came to contest the state-defined national identity. The defection of the Bengalis, rather than containing, exacerbated the ethnic tensions in Pakistan. And part of the reason, as we would argue, was the underestimation on the part of the ruling elite of the 'festering contradiction that lay beneath the surface of Pakistan's political structures' (Ali 1983: 112). Despite the centrality of Islam in the official enterprise to provide ideological foundations for the state, the assertion of these units as nations-in-themselves, contests the 'theory of two-nations'. Wali Khan, the doyen of Pashtun nationalism, articulating the tangible markers of Pashtuns' cultural distinctiveness, discounted any attempt to subsume them within the overarching identity of 'Muslimness'. On being asked whether he was 'a Muslim, a Pakistani, or a Pashtun first', he emphasised that he was a 'sixthousand-year-old Pashtun, a thousand-year-old Muslim and a-27-year-old Pakistani' (cited in Harrison 1987: 285).

The 'ethno-nationalists' have remained resilient to any effort at subsumption in any larger collectivity. With their cultural affiliations anchored in language and territory, their narratives refute any validity to the state-defined categories. Pakistan, Islam, Urdu and Punjab are seen enmeshed in each other and designed to obliterate their cultural specificities. This invariably leads to derision of the deterministic role of religion. G. M. Syed, the 'grand old man of Sindhi nationalism', was candid in putting forth his views:

> Sindh has always been there, Pakistan is a passing show. Sindh is a fact, Pakistan is a fiction. Sindhis are a nation, but Muslims are not a nation. Sindhi language is 2000 years old, Urdu is only 250 years old. Sindhi has 52 letters, Urdu has only 26. The enslavement of Sindh by the Punjab in the name of 'Pakistan' and 'Islam' is a fraud . . . The Sindhis have long been fooled in the name of Islam. (Reproduced in Malkani 1984: 134)

Pakistan is not seen as a 'nation' but, with a subtle inflection of meaning it is transmuted into a 'state' or a 'country'. The territories of Pakistan, therefore, are the abodes of multiple-nations some of which, particularly the Pashtuns, retain extra-territorial ties with their co-nationals in neighbouring states. The duality in their identity and subsequently their loyalty is sought to be reconciled by ethnonationalists by demanding recognition of this multiplicity by the state. The Pakistan National Party (PNP) and its leader Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, have been propagating the theory of four nationalities, that is the Sindhi, Punjabi, Baluchi and Pashtun, each situated in their national homelands, should form a federation of Pakistan, which would ensure iron-cast guarantees against the violation and usurpation of the rights of federating nationalities (Bahadur 1986: 141).

Seemingly accommodative, the theory of four nationalities suffers from its own inadequacy, particularly on the question of Muhajirs. In the emerging ethnic situation and reformulation of national identity, the Muhajirs as an ethnic category provide by far the most adequate illustration for sociological cognition. In the inceptual phase of Pakistan, the Muhajirs along with the Punjabis came to monopolise the structure of authority and decision-making. Muhajir domination was most pronounced in the arena of culture, wherein their inclination towards scriptural Islam and the language, Urdu, came to determine the ideological parameters of the state. So much so that, the two-nation theory and Islamic fundamentalism remained the dominant ideological political current among the Urdu-speakers. Post-Bangladesh, Muhajir political identity came to be redefined. With the rise of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), Muhajirs have increasingly shunned their association with the broader Muslim-Pakistani identity in favour of a particularistic ethnic identity. Claiming that the Muhajirs constitute the 'fifth nationality' of Pakistan, the MQM has increasingly dissociated itself from the two-nation theory:

> Those who have become flag-bearers and self styled champions of the Two Nation Theory do not even know its fundamentals. If believers in this theory were alive today 250,000 believers would not have been living a life of misery and deprivation in Bangaladesh; the Indian Muslims would not have been paying a levy for creating Pakistan by living at the mercy of Hindus; nor would believing Muhajirs had been worse than animals in Pakistan. (MQM *Document* 1972: 1)

Though the MQM ostensibly claims to retain a fledgling link with the theory of 'Muslim nation', the claim of separate national status by the Muhajirs effectively amounts to its repudiation by the very actors in whom the agency for its realisation was restored. The reformulation of Pakistani, is . . . a constant challenge to their nationhood (Malik 1996: 5–6).

By constantly engaging peoples' priorities vis-à-vis Kashmir and thereof, India, the aim is to define and solidify the 'nation state' itself. For ordinary Pakistanis possessing layers of identities, their identification with the state or with their particular national/ethnic group usually operates in different contexts. An inclusive Pakistani identity gains preeminence when confronted with a 'Hindu India'. When it concerns the allocation of resources, their particularistic association as a Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi or as a Pashtun asserts itself (Islam 1981: 69–70); Pakistan as a state partly draws its sustenance through a manipulation of the these identities.

## BANGLADESH: COMPETING TRENDS OF LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

In the course of their long-drawn liberation struggle, the Bengali nationalist identity came to be structured around a strong sense of association with the peculiarities of their language and culture. The ideological hegemony of the Pakistani state, built on Islam, was thus countered giving pre-eminence to ties supposedly un-Islamic. A secular state distancing itself from religion and a nationalism anchored in the Bangla language was, for the *Bangobandhu* Sheikh Mujib and his party—the Awami League—the logical corollary. The preamble to the new Constitution (1972) pledged on the 'high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism' and the national edifice of the new state was defined as:

> The unity and solidity of the Bangalee nation which, deriving its identity from the language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism. (Article 9)

Consistent with it, the Constitution termed the citizens of Bangladesh *Bangalees* and adopted *Amar Sonar Bangla* as the national anthem of the republic (Article 6 and 4 [1]).

Since the rupture from the Pakistani state had to be complete, both politically and ideologically, the secular Bangladesh state epitomised the rejection of all that the Muslim state had stood for—the separate electorates, two-nation theory, and flirtation with the idea of a theological state. A secular polity, however, was not coterminous with promoting irreligiousness in the social and cultural moorings of the people. Aware of the religiosity of the people, Mujib himself felt the compulsion to reassure them against any misgivings regarding the principle:

> Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. You are a Mussalman, you perform your religious rites. There is no irreligiousness on the soil of Bangladesh but there is secularism. This sentence has a meaning and that meaning is that none would be allowed to exploit the people in the name of religion. . . . No communal politics will be allowed in the country.

Seemingly accommodative, the 'Bangalee nationalism' of Mujib still suffered from serious lacunae. The Bangladesh that had emerged was far more homogeneous than its predecessor. An overwhelming majority (99 per cent) constituted the Bengali speech community of which nearly 86 per cent were the followers of Islam. The remaining, a miniscule 1 per cent who were not part of the Bengali speech community, comprised the tribals inhabiting the hill tracts and the Biharis, the descendants of the Urdu-speaking immigrants (Phadnis 1989: 39). A religion-neutral Bangalee national identity would be able to include all the Bengalis irrespective of their religious beliefs but, for the ethnic minorities, assimilation alone into the mainstream could guarantee their continued existence. Further; Bengali nationalism suffered from its own contradictions. Historically, the popular form of Islam in Bengal had facilitated the growth of a peculiarly Bengali syncretist tradition. This, however, did not completely obliterate the Hindu-Muslim distinctions or lead to any fusion of identities. Murshid notes that up till the arrival of the British, the Bengalis were identified as Hindus and the Muslims as immigrants. This distance was maintained by giving a subtle variation in the Bangla language with *Do-bhasha*, containing dozens of Persian and Arabic words being particularly popular in the Muslim-majority East Bengal (Murshid 1993). Besides, during their 20–25-years-long association with the Pakistani state, the Muslims of Bengal were subject to the indoctrination that being Muslims they were a nation-in themselves. In their struggle against Pakistani hegemony, though they had shunned the primacy of Muslim identity, the sovereign Bangladesh still had groups and individuals who had found this hard to digest. The 'Bangalee nationalism' of Mujib was primarily contested by two social and political groupings, the thoughts of each emanating from their own life conditions.

The ethnic minorities comprising a cluster of tribal groupings and inhabiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts had for long preserved their specific culture and tribal solidarity. In contrast to the overwhelming Muslim-majority in Bangladesh, the tribals were adherents of different religions—Buddhism, Christianity, animism and so on, and spoke a variety of Tibeto-Burmese languages. The 'Bangalee nationalism' espoused by the Bangladesh state wherein all the citizens were to be called Bengali, necessarily pre-supposed either the extermination of non-Bengalis or their submergence in the larger collectivity. Thus, the Chakma leader, Manabendra Narayan Larma, refused to be identified with the Bengali nation:

> Under no definition or logic a Chakma can be a Bengalee or a Bengalee can be a Chakma. . . . As citizens of Bangladesh we are all Bangladeshis but we also have a separate ethnic identity, which unfortunately the Awami League leaders do not want to understand. (Cited in Hussain 1986: 201)

A refusal to submerge in the dominant nationality led to the extermination of Urdu-speaking ethnic groups, the Biharis, from the state. The Biharis, instead, have identified themselves with the 'Pakistani' state. With the Muhajirs in Pakistan still seen as alien by the local populace, the Biharis' continued allegiance with Pakistan provides a strange case. A spokesman of the 'stranded Pakistanis' expressed this tension while speaking about their plight: 'The plight of Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh for more than 23 years presents a very strange situation. . . . We are refugees in Bangladesh and eat our heart out for our country which is Pakistan'.[8]

The second category of political actors vehement in their denunciation of the 'linguistic nationalism' was, if broadly termed, the traditionalists or 'Islamic nationalists'. They consisted of the *ulamas* and political formations such as the Jamaat-i-Islami, the Muslim League and others. Being the bearers of scriptural Islam, they regarded the importation of Bengali language and cultural observances as contrary to Islamic consciousness. Envisaging a pan-Islamic solidarity, they had remained scornful of the liberation-struggle. Some of them, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami of East Pakistan had actively collaborated with the Pakistani army against their co-nationals (Ahmad 1993: 501).

A conscious decimation of the Islamic identity and adoption of secularism as state policy compelled the Islamic traditionalists, in the post-liberation phase, to launch a campaign for 'Muslim Bengal'. Retaining a vague association with the original two-nation theory, they argued for only Muslims in Bengal to be declared nationals. Quite oblivious to the verdict of history, they nursed the vision of a united Pakistan. Owing to the lack of organisational base and popular support, the 'Muslim Bengal' movement gradually dissipated. The secular-oriented 'Bangalee nationalism' as it had evolved in the liberation struggle remained a strong ideological current among the Bengali populace, particularly so in the inceptual phase. As Trevor Ling, writing as early as in 1972, observed:

> There is, in fact, . . . a greater community of interest between Muslims and Hindus than might be expected. The division between the two no longer corresponds with a difference in economic function. The real lines of cleavage, as recent events have demonstrated are more between Bengali and non-Bengali than along religious communal lines. . . . There is thus likely to be a reasonable degree of convergence between the expectations of the leadership with regard to the new state, as secular, democratic and socialist, and, of the people. (1972: 227)

Ling's observation receives further confirmation through an empirical study of Nasim Javed, done in more or less the same period. The study, conducted among middle-class professionals, found greater incidence of those who described their nationality in terms of their country or ethnic group (60 per cent) over those who defined their nationhood in terms of the Islamic faith. Significantly, a substantial proportion (24 per cent) identified with Islam as well as the Bengali nation, finding the two identifications perfectly compatible (Javed 1974: 38–39, 47–48).

The 'Bangalee nationalism' of Mujib, defined in terms of a single-symbol thrust—the language—could barely distinguish itself from the 60 million Bengali Hindus in the neighbouring West Bengal. This orientation of the state took a retreat following the military coup, whereby Zia-ur-Rahman took over the reins of power. And as was witnessed in the case of Zia's Pakistan, Zia-ur-Rahman turned increasingly towards Islam to legitimise his military junta. One of the foremost actions in this regard was the insertion of the invocation 'Bismillal-ir-Rahman-ir Rahim' (In the name of Allah, the Beneficient, the Merciful) in the preamble to the Constitution. Article 8 (1) which had declared secularism as the cardinal principle was amended to read, 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah'. Similarly, a new clause was included which declared the intentions of the state towards 'stabilising, preserving and strengthening fraternal ties with the Muslim states on the basis of Islamic solidarity' (Ahmad and Nazneen 1990: 796). In the process, the national identity also came to be remoulded. The 'Bangalee nationalism' was replaced by 'Bangladeshi' in the amended Constitution, and Zia himself gave a comprehensive explanation of the new connotation:

> Bangladeshi nationalism means, we are Bangladeshis. We have a different history. Our country has been through a different process. Our traditions and culture are different. Our language is different, we are moulding it in our own way—we are modernizing it. We have different prose and poetry; we have different arts and thoughts. Our geographical position is different, our rivers and soils are different. Our people are different. We are completely free and sovereign. . . . And, today a consciousness has grown among our people, which is different from that of the people of our neighbouring country and other countries of the region. (Cited in Huq 1984: 58)

Apparently identical, the 'Bangalee nationalism' of the Awami League and the Bangladeshi nationalism associated with the BNP (the Bangladeshi National Party), differed markedly in terms of emphasis on language and culture, inclusion and exclusion of 'nationals' and 'aliens'. While the former appreciated the territorial and political separateness from the Indian Bengal but accepted the entire heritage of the Bengali language and culture as its own, the latter highlighted the cultural differences between the two regions by bringing in religion as the defining marker of 'Bangladeshi nation' along with language. The change was significant, as Urmila Phadnis has pointed out:

> . . . instead of the earlier single symbol thrust (Bengali)for the identity of its people, the inclusion of Islamic provisions (connoting a religious symbol) coupled with the change from 'Bengalis' to 'Bangladeshis' (emphasising territorial homeland symbol) provided a multi-symbol

> congruence in the Bangladesh nation in differentiating it from India just as language differentiates it from Pakistan. (Phadnis 1989: 107)

The anxiety to invoke a 'national personality' free of the cultural association with the neighbouring Bengal, drove Zia towards adopting certain hegemonic measures. Endeavours were made to remould the language, history and culture of Bangladesh, particularly so in language, where efforts were made to infest the Bengali language with words from Persian and Arabic vocabulary—measures to revive the now obsolete *Do-bhasha* or the artificial measures to create *Pak-Bangla*. Thus, the slogan *Jai Bangla*—linguistically of Bengali origin was replaced with the more Persianised *Bangladesh Zindabad*. The de-emphasisation of Bengali language was carried further by referring to Bangladesh Betar as 'Radio Bangladesh' (Murshid 1993: 70–72).

Sociologically, the new concept of 'Bangladeshi nation', invoked by Zia was essentially teleological as it impinged on the formation of the state. The nation here is defined then in terms of the political unit and the political community to which it caters; while historically, nations have preceded states. Moreover, the possibility of the same nation residing in the realms of different states has remained a theoretical as well as an empirical viability; for instance, the pre-unification Germans, and among the Muslims, the Arabs. The 'Bangalee nationalism' of the Awami League has effectively addressed this ambiguity:

> In terms of statehood and citizenship, we are Bangladeshis but in terms of nationality we are Bangalees . . . Bangladesh has been created through a bloody liberation war based on the symbol of Bangalee nationality. Bangalee is the national identity of the people of this Bangladesh. This identity is hundreds of years old. It has not been possible to wipe out this identity despite all out efforts during the Pakistan period. Nor will it be possible to do so in the future. (Cited in Huq 1984: 63)

## Conclusion

The conceptualisation of nation and national identity in the state-societies of Pakistan and Bangladesh have been contingent to the vicissitudes of history. More often than not, it is the exigency of power and politics that have been deterministic in drawing its parameters and boundaries, terms of inclusion and exclusion. Given the flux in the political context itself, a constant reshaping of the attributes of nation often reveals contradictions. Mujahirs provide an interesting illustration. When in alliance with Punjabis, they remained the principal bearers of Muslim/Pakistani nation. Devoid of power and patronage, the Muhajirs, more recently, have claimed themselves as the 'fifth nation' of Pakistan. Similarly, among Muslims of Bengal, language-centric Bengali nationalism remained the dominant trend vis-à-vis the religious nationalism espoused by the Pakistani state. Post-liberation, religion has reappeared to define the nationhood of the populace.

Such flexibility in conceiving 'nation' receives validity from theoretical formulations where the 'subjective will' of the political actors remains the only viable attribute of nation. Consistent with this, an incessant drive in the South Asian states of Pakistan and Bangladesh has been to conflate state and nation. Designed towards obfuscating the reality, their implications—social and political—have been far and wide, one of the professed objectives being to define the terminality of loyalty, so as to hierarchise the bases of association with which people identify themselves (Oommen 1997). Nation tends to be constructed in terms of the 'will of the dominant', thus making 'national mainstream' a euphemism for the cultural proclivities and material interests of the former. Punjabi domination in Pakistan and Bengali Muslim hegemony in Bangladesh represent such an appropriation of nation leading to the ethnification or extermination of marginal groups.

Since concepts in social science emerge out of particular historical experience, yet without transcending their immediate empirical context, they remain of limited utility (ibid.: 23); a plausible way out would be to conceive nation as an objective social reality rather than as an appendage, or a construct. The task is to find out tangible factors—language, culture and territory—critical in conceiving and defining nation. Seen thus, Pakistan is an abode of multiple nations—Punjabi, Baluch, Pashtun and Sindhi. A near homogeneity of Bengali-speakers in Bangladesh still restricts it from qualifying as a 'nation-state' owing to the presence of non-Bengali tribal groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. For the state and their ideologues, this amounts to a recognition of the plurality of identifications, not necessarily detrimental to the political association with the state. This implies the recovery of concepts like nation and nationhood from artificially contrived statist discourses and institutionalisation of multi-cultural co-existence within the confines of the same polity. A pluralist perspective of the kind derides attempts to define any cultural/ national mainstream through coercive measures like assimilation or annihilation. In contrast, the orientation is towards accepting and accommodating differences.

## NOTES

1. The idea that the 'nation' and 'state' are conceptually distinct and may not appear coterminous has had a long career. However, in most contributions on the theme, nation is seen as a prerequisite for state formation. Nation is seen either coinciding with state, or as state-seeking. This leads to considerable interchangeability in the usage of the two terms. More recently, Oommen (1997) has emphasised the importance of maintaining a distinction between the two. The existence of the multinational ethnic states is therefore not only a theoretical possibility, but also an objective fact of history.

2. Muhajirs comprise largely the Urdu-speaking immigrants from the erstwhile Muslim minority provinces of British India. The Muhajirs arrived in Pakistan as proud champions of the 'Muslim nation'. Interestingly, not all the Partition-induced immigrants acquired this connotation. A vast majority of the nearly seven million Muslims who crossed the frontiers consisted of Punjabi speakers from eastern Punjab, who on account of the commonalty of language and culture, readily assimilated with the ethos of the west Punjab. The term 'Muhajir' came to be associated only with the latter section of the Urdu-speaking Muslim migrants who filled urban Sindh, replacing the migrating Sindhi Hindus. Resenting their being referred to by the natives as Pahangirs or Hindustanis, they conferred on themselves the nominative 'Muhajir', owing to its association with the prophetic tradition of *hijrat*, or emigration due to religious motives (Ahmed 1988: 33–34). For the migrating Punjabis, it was at the most a shift from one part of their homeland to another. The Muhajir case, on the other, is typical of social groups de-nationalised from their native land, and who have failed to re-nationalise in the adopted homeland. They thus qualify as an interest group or an ethnic category in Pakistan.

3. Whereas others have seen civil society in opposition to the state, Gramsci (1973) did not perceive it to be completely autonomous. Since the institutions of civil society are subject to the control of the state, the

hegemony of ideas necessary for the sustenance of the state is actualised only through civil society and its institutions.

4. This is of course not to suggest that Pakistan has been solely a consensual state where force is not resorted to. In fact, politics everywhere and particularly so in Pakistan, has rested upon a mix of consent and coercion, both being omnipresent. When consent is absent, coercion shows its face, usually in the form of the application of military power.

5. *Seminar*, June 1971, p. 24.

6. The model of internal colonialism put forth by Hechter (1975) contrasts with the diffusion model of nation-building espoused by the theorists of political development and modernisation. According to Hechter, rather than levelling cultures as the latter claim, economic development institutionalises inequality-creating conditions of internal colonialism and crystallisation of cultural markers. During the regime of Ayub Khan, Pakistan took to economic development and industrialisation hoping that the modernising impulses would diffuse tensions. Contrarily, the state's agenda failed to arrest the discontent since the fruits of development were cornered by Punjab in particular.

7. The Ahmediyas, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Quadian (Punjab), have been regarded as heretics by the orthodoxy due to their rejection of the finality of Mohammad's prophethood. Soon after the formation of Pakistan, anti-Ahmediya riots, actively abetted by the traditionalists, broke out in Pakistani Punjab. In the early 1970s, Ahmediyas were declared non-Muslims as a beleaguered Bhutto government took recourse to Islam. The measure, carried out with vehemence during Zia's regime, confirmed the ethnification of the Ahmediyas in their own land.

8. Nasim Khan's statement in *Muslim India*, 1995, p. 45.

CHAPTER 13

# Representing Muslims in Postcolonial India

## Constitution of a Political Discourse

Hilal Ahmed

> Think for one moment. What course did you adopt? Where have you reached, and where do you stand now? Haven't your senses become torpid? Aren't you living in a constant state of fear? This fear is your own creation, a fruit of your own deeds. . . . If your hearts have still not changed and your minds still have reservations, it is a different matter. But, if you want a change, then take your cue from history, and cast yourself in the new mould.
>
> —Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Speech at Jama Masjid, 23 October 1947

> Have those who remained here changed at least after that? Has their old hostility and murderous mood, which resulted in widespread riots, looting, arson, raping and all sorts of orgies on an unprecedented scale in 1946–47, come to a halt at least now? It would be suicidal to delude ourselves into believing that they have turned patriots overnight after the creation of Pakistan. On the contrary, the Muslim menace has increased a hundred fold by the creation of Pakistan which has become a springboard for all their future aggressive designs on our country (Golwalkar 1966: 148).

### MUSLIM REPRESENTATION AND MUSLIM 'ADJUSTMENT'

The question of Muslim politics or representation of Muslims in politics in postcolonial India, especially in the 1950s, is either understood as a story of a devastated community, which lost its prestige, power and even certain political privileges and turned out to be a 'minority' after the Partition; or, as a tale of political betrayal which not only destroyed the unity and integrity of the motherland but posed serious challenges to the very existence of the Indian nation-state. One finds an *ideological* difference in these two positions. A strong claim that the Partition was a 'detrimental decision', which actually weakened the prospects of Muslims in India constitutes the basic thrust of *Congress Muslim* argument. Although people like Azad remained quite sympathetic to the immediate issues and problems of the 'community', they were, as it seems, more concerned about the 'lost power' of Muslims.[1] This might be the reason behind Azad's apparent unhappiness with the conducts and actions of Muslims in the speech quoted here.

On the other hand, the second position clearly reproduces the 'one religion-one nation' doctrine and opposes special arrangements for the representation of Muslims on the ground of immediate historical contingencies (separate electorate; Pakistan, etc.). This kind of essentialism was not entirely associated with the ideology of the Jan Sangh, a political party that claimed to offer a 'truly' nationalist alternative to Congress in 1951; a section of Congressmen also shared this form of nationalism to counter the 'appeasement of minorities'![2] The political acts and deeds of Muslims are again identified as a clear threat to the nation in this case.[3]

Despite the fact that these positions deviate significantly from each other, they seem to share and internalise two strong assumptions about Muslim representation: (*a*) Muslims of India as a political community are fully conscious of their political interest and legal rights, and as a result, they are sincerely involved in political action. Thus, there is/there should be no difference between the community and the 'community representatives'; (*b*) the Muslim politics—either as a form of communalism (Jan Sangh's position) or as a form of collective self-defence (Azad's position)—is an undifferentiated phenomenon, which to some extent, is regulated by a self-governing Islamic substance. Thus, the political-institutional changes, regional variations, caste-class and linguistic differences among Muslims, are almost inconsequential for any debate on Muslim representation.[4]

This dominant portrayal of a conscious Muslim community/static-communal Muslim politics is also reflected, though rather differently, in academic analysis. In fact, one encounters an interesting 'Muslim adjustment thesis', which connects the histories of Partition to the postcolonial realities of Muslims.[5] We are informed about various plans of the British government to solve the political stalemate in India in the mid-1940s; then the focus shifted to the Constituent Assembly debates, minority rights and nature of electorates in independent India; finally, in the backdrop of the Partition and mass exodus of Muslims to Pakistan, this standard narrative concludes with a few 'touching' and overtly *secular* quotes taken from the famous speeches delivered by Nehru and Azad to show how and why Muslims in India 'adjusted and accommodated' after the Partition! Although a 'benefit of doubt' is given to a few Congress Muslims such as Azad in this over-descriptive analysis, a strong, rigid and fixed dividing line between 'communal' Muslim *politicians* and 'left-liberal' Muslim *intelligentsia* is established.[6] Surprisingly, the Muslim cultural/religious heterogeneity, which constitutes the basic core of this argument, is never expanded, even analytically, to make sense of the plurality of Muslim political responses in postcolonial India.[7] As a result, two obvious concerns—the relationship between Muslim leaders and Muslim communities and the placing of the so-called 'communal Muslim representatives' in the institutional apparatus of the postcolonial state—do not get any academic attention in this dominant 'secular' reading of Muslim politics. In fact, the 1950s is understood as 'freezing point' in this narrative—not merely to conclude the modern 'history' of Muslim politics in India/south Asia but also to develop a few set of arguments about nationalism/separatism, communalism/secularism and even inclusion/exclusion of Muslims in India.[8]

This chapter tries to move away from this adjustment and accommodation thesis. Instead of analysing the trauma of a divided 'nation', political legacy of Partition, or historical genealogy of Hindutva, I try to explore the multiple forms of interaction between evolving political institutions and Muslim political groups in the first decade of postcolonial period. The study of these interactions, I believe, can help us in making sense of the sources, ideas and norms by which an acceptable vocabulary of politics was produced and played out by the state as well as the Muslim political elites.

The chapter raises two basic issues. It tries to explore the changing self-perceptions of Muslim politics—the meanings of, and expectations with, the complex institutional mechanism set up by the Constitution. I ask a rather apparent question: how did the introduction of democratic institutions—universal adult franchise and joint electorate—contribute to the evolving forms of Muslim political representation in post-Partition period? In order to confine the scope of our discussion, I critically look at two important, yet unexplored sites—the electoral participation of Muslim communities in various elections in the 1950s and the changing programme, policies and methods of mobilisations of a few leading Muslim groups. My second concern is more empirical. Problematising the idea of India in actual 'federal' sense—the merger of various Princely States in the Indian Union and subsequent reorganisation of states in 1956—the chapter discusses a straightforward poser: How does the process of the territorial unification of India affect the discursive make-up of a multi-layered Muslim politics of representation?

It is important to clarify that my purpose is not to discover the secular, subaltern or 'real' Muslim voices—partly because my sources do not allow me to make such an assertion and partly because the exploration of this kind might overload our questions.[9] In order to avoid this possible overlapping, the claims made by Muslim political groups in order to characterise themselves as Muslim 'representatives' remains the thematic focus of this chapter. In this sense, the argument presented here is rather limited—I offer a contextual reading of first few elections to analyse the 'formal representation' of Muslims, which adheres to the secular identity of candidates as well as the voters. However, at the same time, the notion of 'Muslim presence' is also evoked, though rather sketchily, to point towards an 'informal form of representation', which stems from the constitutional recognition given to Muslims as a minority.[10]

## IDEAS OF REPRESENTATION AND IMAGINATION OF A 'SECULAR VOTER'

The official report published by the Election Commission on the first general elections offers us a fascinating historical description of the election process in the 1950s. Highlighting the elections of 1951 as an important political event, the report talks about the importance of 'political education'. It says:

> The need to educate the vast inexperienced electorate was so compelling that the Central and State Governments also had to

> take a hand in the task. Necessary precautions were, however, taken by the Commission so that governmental publicity might be strictly free from any party bias. A series of documentary films were screened with the sole purpose of educating the voters in election matters, and these were released all over the country. Although our broadcasting facilities have yet to make up a good deal of leeway in the more backward rural areas of the country, the radio generally proved to be a potent aid to publicity and mass education. From time to time, the Chief Election Commissioner gave a series of talks on the radio which covered subjects like (1) The General Elections—democracy's biggest experiment; (2) Delimitation proposals; (3) Holding of a poll; (4) Public servants and democracy; (5) The citizen voter; (6) The women citizens; (7) Need to educate the voter—the role of the Press, Radio and film, etc. Many of the Chief Electoral Officers broadcast similar talks in the respective States. Arrangements were also made by the All India Radio to give interesting non-party talks or dialogues on elections in order to cater to the needs and tastes of the villagers. ('Report on the First General Elections' 1954: 213)

This massive agenda of the government to disseminate political knowledge should not be seen entirely as an innovation. Political education and reform had always been an important technique of nationalist politics.[11] In fact, it was an inevitable political compulsion. The colonial political institutions—even at the local levels—were not designed to ensure direct political participation of communities. Although administrative categories in British India were largely based on religious affiliation of communities, the class (in terms of property and income) was the actual criterion for determining the eligibility of electorates.[12] In this sense, there were very limited numbers of people, who actually participated in electoral politics.

The dominant national politics, on the other hand, envisaged and encouraged mass participation. After the rise of Gandhian politics, the nature of nationalist mobilisation transformed quite significantly. The rhetoric of freedom gradually evolved with an equally powerful demand for more democratic, just and responsible government. However, the Congress's *swaraj* politics and the League's 'Muslim-interest', politics did not entirely ignore the colonial institutional mechanism in the late 1930s and 1940s. Both the parties, despite rejecting the Government of India Act 1935, participated in 1937 elections. Yet, the gap between the level of political awareness and mass participation had always been recognised.

The dissemination of information and procedure regarding the universal adult franchise, nevertheless, was a complicated project for the newly established Indian state. Unlike the colonial period, the objective was not merely to inform people about the nature and function of political institutions; there was a conscious attempt to ensure the participation of those sections of society, which had not yet ever involved in the direct electoral politics of any kind.[13] This could be the reason behind Nehru's clear adherence to individual's secular political identity as a voter. The following example is useful. Nehru says:

> Reports of refusal of women to give their names in some places for inclusion on electoral rolls have come to my notice. The vote meant for the individual not for the wife of so and so. If women, therefore, decline to give their names, they will have to be kept out of the voters' lists. (Nehru n.d., 15: 239)

This secularisation of election process, nevertheless, was also seen as an experiment. The universal adult franchise was not only a new experience for 18 million Indians, who were already envisaged by the Constitution as electorates, but it was also a different political phenomenon for the Indian political elites. They had not been subjected to popular mandate so far. In fact, they were equally apprehensive about the outcome of elections.[14] Precisely for these reasons, the dissemination of political knowledge had a very important role to play in determining the outcome of democratic politics of representation.

There was another structural aspect of electoral politics. In British India, the constituencies were divided on communal lines for ensuring the effective functioning of separate electorate. Although this system was outrightly rejected by the Constituent Assembly, we find some interesting proposals in relation to the protection of minorities during these deliberations, particularly in the post-Partition phase (Bajpai 2012).

Z. H. Lari, a Muslim member, for example, argues, '. . . there should be multi-member constituencies, of say two, three or four to be fixed by Parliament—resulting in allowing the minorities to group their votes'. In order to substantiate this point, Lari further notes:

> [O]n 15 October 1947, the national executive of the Socialist Party adopted a resolution in the course of which it is said, "All election should be by direct, secret, adult suffrage, under a system of joint electorate. There should be multi-member constituencies, and voting should be according to the system of cumulative votes, thus providing for minority representation". (Noorani 2003: 86)

The idea of multi-member constituency was also raised by Jayaprakash Narayan. He wrote a letter to Nehru describing the possible problems of proposed Indian electoral system based on single-member constituency. Narayan was particularly concerned about the 'exclusion of minorities'. He argued that opposition parties had favoured three-member constituency with cumulative vote as the first choice and single-member constituency as the second (Nehru n.d., 15: 240). In his response, Nehru not merely defends the single-member constituency as the most effective mode for safeguarding the principles of democratic participation, but also brings in the question of political education of voters. Rejecting the proportional representation systems, he says,

> I could understand a complete system of proportional representation by a single transferable vote and plural constituencies. That is physically impossible as it is very intricate. . . . If we introduced PR that would made it absolutely impossible, both from organizational point of view, and that of the voter who will not understand its intricacies. (Ibid.)

Nehru also opposed the tentative proposal of the UP government which intended to create 143 two-member constituencies for the State Legislative Assembly consisting of 430 seats. While each of 90 such constituencies was to have a seat reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC), the other 53 constituencies were unreserved to facilitate the return of some Muslims, if possible (ibid.). Nehru's response was categorical:

> I am entirely opposed to any two-member constituency, except where a seat is reserved for the Scheduled Caste or Tribe. I think this will

> be contrary to the Cabinet decision and, in any event, undesirable. The UP government should be so informed. (Ibid.)

Nehru's firm belief in single-member constituencies needs also to be seen in relation to the practicalities of delimitation.[15] In the absence of proper statistical information, the division of political units was going to be a make-shift kind of arrangement. In order to solve such discrepancies, it was important to institutionalise the procedure of delimitation. The Delimitation Commission Act 1952 was an obvious outcome in this regard.

The identification of the individual as voter had some direct implication for the ongoing debates on India's citizenship. It is important here to remember that the 1947–51 period was full of uncertainties, especially in north India.[16] The debates on and actualities of evacuee properties in India and Pakistan during this period, as Joya Chatterji (2012) rightly argues, had generated tremendous pressure on the two governments to formulate context-oriented notions of citizenship. The right to vote, in this sense, was a much more complicated question. On the one hand, the 'territorial affiliation' of majorities and minorities was to be translated into voters' lists—a task which was very difficult at the time of uncertainties and continuous migration of communities. On the other hand, there were a few obvious technical problems which had emerged due to the procedural complexities of elections. Nehru's response to Shyama Prasad Mookerji's letter very clearly underlines these two concerns. Moorkerji demanded that all refugees, who had migrated to India after 25 July 1949, must be considered as eligible voters in India. While acknowledging the anxieties of migrants about formal citizenship, Nehru simply refused to change the schedule of general elections. He says:

> I do not think there will be any difficulty about the granting of citizenship rights to those migrants from Pakistan who stay on in India. The question of giving voting rights is, however, full of difficulty . . . their position is exceedingly fluid and it is very difficult to say who is a permanent resident of India and who is a temporary sojourner . . . There does not seem to be any particular reason for complaint on the part of some refugees who have come here in recent months. (Nehru n.d., 15: 242)

Let us sum up this discussion by underlining three aspects of the institutional mechanism of democracy that emerged in the 1950s.

- The Indian electoral system, at least theoretically, addresses the voters as secular individuals.
- The proportional representation of any kind was rejected. The direct election based on universal adult franchise was seen as the best possible mode to ensure democratic participation.
- Although the voters were envisaged as 'rational agents', the information regarding the process of elections were widely disseminated to provide a 'political training' to electorates. This was equally applicable for the poor and uneducated members of culturally/regionally diversified Muslim communities, who like other deprived sections of society, were not entirely aware of the intricacies of electoral politics.

The question of Muslim 'representation', in my view, needs to be seen in relation to these institutional aspects of emerging political system.

## 'INTEGRATION' OR 'SECULARISATION': MUSLIMS AND ELECTIONS

I would like to begin with an interesting debate on the participation of Muslims in politics. Gopal Krishna produced a systematic sociological analysis of Indian electoral politics in 1967 in his article 'Electoral Participation and National Integration'. Since he did not conduct any post-poll sample survey, this article relies heavily on the official statistics produced by the Election Commission. Commenting on the Muslim political participation in elections (as voters as well as candidates) Krishna observes:

> Competitive electoral politics has probably begun to break down the isolation of the Muslim electorate from the political process. Communal solidarity is clearly being subjected to pressure by electoral competition; more than one Muslim candidate contesting from the same constituency indicates that the Muslim community does not operate as a monolith entity in politics. (Krishna 1967: 187)

In order to substantiate this broad observation, Krishna offers two factual evidences. He finds that 42 Muslim candidates contested election for 35 Lok Sabha constituencies in the first general election in 1952. However, the enthusiasm for electoral politics among Muslims increased quite steadily—in 1957, 61 Muslim candidates fought elections for 46 seats, while in 1961 there were 130 Muslim candidates for 83 Lok Sabha constituencies. This increasing number of Muslim candidates, Krishna suggests, was the fact that Muslims adopted electoral politics as a preferred mode to participate in public life.

The second evidence is also 'candidate-centric'. Krishna carefully cross-examines the constituency-wise statistics for Muslim candidates in Lok Sabha and discovers an interesting factual trajectory. He finds that 'Muslim candidates secured 2.87 per cent of the total valid votes polled in 1952, 3.91 in 1957 and 5.74 in 1962' (ibid.: 185). These figures are complicated because constituency-level data do not clearly tell us the sociological breakup of electorates. In other words, we cannot ascertain the 'Muslim' support to Muslim candidates with this kind of aggregate data. Krishna is aware of this technical problem. To avoid such confusions, he looks at the party affiliation of Muslim candidates in these elections. This comparison allows him to argue that the success rate of those Muslims candidates who were affiliated with national parties was much higher in comparison to those who fought elections either as independent candidates or were given tickets by other parties. In fact, this turns out to be his larger point. He says, '. . . those seeking election have to depend on the support of communities other than their own has the effect of broadening their horizons, extending their area of concern and in the process promoting the slow integration of their community into the emerging secular society' (ibid.: 187).

Imtiaz Ahmad, who followed this analysis very carefully, wrote a critical reply in the same journal. In this rejoinder, Ahmad admits the general point raised by Krishna that Muslim participation in political process had increased; however, he does not accept the claim that the Muslim politics is being secularised. He complains: 'I find myself unable to agree with his view that these trends necessarily imply that Muslims are becoming increasingly secularised politically or that communal solidarity is being subjected to pressure by electoral competition' (Ahmad 1967). Ahmad points out that the role played by the organised Muslim political groups, particularly, the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (AIMMM) in elections clearly suggests that Muslims in north India 'are trying to consolidate themselves politically so as to be able to influence the political process directly' (ibid.: 521). He concludes:

> . . . A careful perusal of the election statistics will reveal that Muslim candidates have so far been generally sponsored by national political parties in areas which contain a substantial number of Muslim voters. Moreover, they stand fewer chances of victory against Hindu candidates in straight or triangular contests. If a Muslim candidate can win an election from a predominantly Hindu constituency, then we may claim that the process of political integration is at work. I wonder if the political process in India today is moving in that direction. (Ibid.: 522)

Although one might point towards an obvious methodological dispute between Ahmad and Krishna, which led them to different conclusions, there are a few wider issues, which could help us understand the electoral logic of postcolonial Muslim politics of the 1950s.[17] Krishna's careful analysis does not make a difference between Muslim candidates and Muslim masses (though he stresses upon the limitation of data in this regard). As a result, he wants us to believe that increasing participation of Muslims underlines the fact that electoral politics leads towards greater integration and political secularisation. Ahmad, on the other hand, is not satisfied with the undifferentiated picture of Muslim politics. He brings in the actuality of politics—AIMM's opposition to Congress, consolidation of Muslims as a pressure group, etc.—to problematise Krishna's broad thesis. Interestingly, however, Ahmad's much emotive *communalisation of Muslim politics* argument remains completely insensitive to the complex relationship between Muslim leaders/organised groups and Muslim masses. Although Ahmad recognises the cultural and religious plurality of Muslims in his writings in general and his take on communalism in particular, the 'Muslims' in this case appears as a closed analytical category. This strange reductionism somehow restricts the possibility of a deeper analysis of election as a sociological phenomenon. Nevertheless, the debate introduces us, at least in the context of the 1950s, to the fact that Muslims as voters as well as candidates were deeply involved in the political process. But the question arises: if we take the diversity of Indian Muslim community as a sociological fact and if we also recognise a perceptible difference between Muslim leaders and Muslim masses, what was the nature of Muslim political mobilisations in the 1950s?

## REORGANISATION OF STATES AND MUSLIM POLITICS

The 'unification' of India is often understood as a liner trajectory of political transition. Except three tragedies—Hyderabad, Junagarh and Kashmir—our story of federalism seems to be simple, and to some extent, straightforward. However, this was actually not the case. The merger of Princely States into the Indian Union was a complex process, which affected the institutional architecture of the state envisaged by the Constitution itself.[18]

There were three kinds of states at the time of independence: State A—territory of former British India, State B—Princely States, and State C—centrally administered territories. The various agreements with rulers of Princely States (July–August 1947) ensured them a 'privy purse'. They were expected to recognise the Government of India as supreme sovereign body. These agreements were for one year initially. However, after the enactment of the Constitution, the formal merger took place and these states became part of the Republic of India.[19]

This multi-stage process, in any case, cannot be seen as a dialogue between two parties—Government of India and the princes; the local politics also had a much greater role to play in these negotiations. In fact, these region-specific political discussions actually contributed to the shaping of a national political discourse in a significant way. In other words, we find a two-way movement: the legal-constitutional vocabulary (by which a well-ordered and neat idea of India was imagined by the Constitution) is employed by the political elite to make sense of chaotic, messy and unpredictable regional realities. At the same time, the claims, demands and assertions of various stakeholders at the regional level were accommodated without making any radical changes in the newly established institutional setup.[20] This reciprocal encounter between *national* and *regional* thus led to two significant outcomes: (*a*) The territories of the Princely States were reorganised and various linguistically marked *states* as legitimate political units emerged, and (*b*) the regional political discourses began to influence the ideological configuration of national politics.[21]

Muslim League's politics in southern India is a good example to elaborate this point. The Partition had an adverse effect on the organisational structure of the Muslim League in India. Many League supporters and local leaders either migrated to Pakistan or joined the Congress in the north.[22] However, this was not the case in southern India. The Muslim League survived in this region—partly because of its organisational strength in the Madras Province and partly because of the regional orientation of its main leaders. In addition, there was another important geo-political factor. The condition of Muslims in the south was significantly different from that in the north in the 1950s. Although, Nizam-ruled state of Hyderabad had been the worse sufferer of the Partition in the south, the Muslim communities of this region (Madras Province, Mysore, Malabar region and the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin) did not have to confront the kind of hostile attitude of the state machinery, which had already marginalised the Muslims in north India.[23] As a result, the political atmosphere was somehow conducive for the Muslim groups, particularly for the Muslim League, to work out a rather experimental politics in the 1950s.

The Madras Muslim League, as it was known at that time, approached the Congress for an electoral alliance at local level in 1951.[24] Evoking the old argument that the League was the sole representative organisation of Indian Muslims, it was suggested that: '. . . the Congress must support the League's Muslim candidates and not run any Muslim candidate itself' (Wright 1966). This interesting proposal needs to be seen in its contextual specificity. The League did not entirely rely on the pre-Partition claim that Muslim interests could only be protected through adequate institutional safeguards. The logic of representation was, to a certain extent, different this time, at least in one crucial sense. The League was going to participate in an open electoral competition. This decision was an outcome of a long ongoing internal debate.[25] The separate electorate, reservation of seats and even suggestion for having proportional representation had already been rejected. In this scenario, the only option for the League was to identity a few safe 'Muslim' seats.

It was not at all difficult, at least in the Madras province. As we have noted, the constituencies were to be carved out on the basis of estimated population data in the 1951 elections; and, in the absence of any proper delimitation, the identification of Muslim dominated districts was a much easier task. However, the League, it seems, was not fully confident of the Muslim votes. It had no experience of mass-based electoral politics, and precisely for this reason, it was obvious for the League leaders to remain apprehensive about Muslim support in an open competition.[26] Therefore, it was inevitable for them to negotiate with the Congress for 'Muslim' seats.

From Congress's point of view, the possibility of an electoral 'deal' with the League, especially in the context of 1951 was going to be a tricky business. Although the League had modified its conventional position on Muslim interests and was trying to project itself as legitimate competitor, its rhetoric of Muslim representation was being considered as a sophisticated form of communalism/separatism. In addition, League's offer was based on the proposition that a 'pure politics of Muslim exclusivism' could also be played out in a completely different institutional setting, even if the individual was addressed as a secular voter. Of course, the spirit of this proposal stems from the practicalities of electoral arithmetic; but, this kind of assertions were unacceptable in the 1950s. Nehru was keen to ensure that the electoral mechanism should also reflect the principles of secular participation of masses as citizens. The Congress High Command, as expected, thus turned down this offer and it went for the elections in the province without any formal coalition. The Muslim League, on the other hand, contested as a regional party and managed to get one Lok Sabha seat.

This electoral debacle forced the League to rework its future strategies. It is true that senior League leader B. Pocker won from the Malappuram constituency of Madras Province; but this success could not be appreciated as a 'satisfactory' performance, particularly when the Party was still relying on 'Muslim exclusiveness' as its main ideological position. To understand League's dilemma, let us look at the detailed result of Malappuram constituency. It was a triangular contest. Although Pocker won the seat, he secured only 38.98 per cent votes, while the other two candidates (T. V. Chathukutty Nair of the Congress and Kumhali Karikedan of CPI) received 30.65 per cent and 30.38 per cent of votes respectively ('Statistical Report on General Elections' 1954: 127). The apprehension that League could not depend on Muslim votes in an open competition turned out to be factually correct in this case. After all, the Malapurram district was a Muslim-majority area and the League could have expected a much better performance here. It was, therefore, important for the party to carefully look at the changing political geography of the southern region till next elections.

The reorganisation of states on linguistic basis led to the creation of the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala in this region. This territorial reconstitution also contributed to the reformation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies. From Muslim League's point of view, the state of Kerala was quite important. It had a sizeable Muslim population and the possibility to have more 'secured Muslim seats' was much higher. Although negotiations for another League–Congress alliance for the 1957 general elections had failed, the party, it seems, was keen to consolidate itself at the state level.

Kerala had emerged mainly from the Princely state of Travancore. Travancore first merged with Cochin and then the British district of Malabar was also included to form a new Malayalam-speaking state. These changes gave a new political life to the Muslim League. Kerala was to accommodate around 18 per cent of Muslim population. This 'Muslim presence' could have given the League a level playing ground in the region.[27] There was another factor. The Communists had emerged as a major political force in this newly created state. In fact, the CPI won 60 seats (out of 100 seats and got 40.57 per cent of votes) in 1957 assembly elections of Kerala and formed the first elected communist government in India ('Statistical Report on Kerala Assembly Elections' 1957). This overwhelming success of the Communists was somehow beneficial for the League. It was much easier for them to oppose CPI on the ground of religion: the Communists could have been termed as 'atheists' easily for launching any 'save Islam' campaign. On the other hand, anti-Communist stand could also be used to attract the Congress. Nehru had already recognised the Communist as his major political opponent. The logic of 'democratic revolution' was still being seen as a possible threat for 'nation-building'.

Thus, the 'discovery' of the communists as common 'enemy' in Kerala, gave an opportunity to the League to form a 'tactical' political coalition with the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in 1960. In order to overthrow the communists, a mass movement against the CPI-led state government was launched by the coalition of Congress, League and PSP. The outcome of the agitation was quite predictable: the Centre intervened, the elected government was toppled, and finally, the President's Rule was imposed under Article 356 of the Constitution. This 'success' of the coalition cleared the way for an electoral pact between the League and the Congress.[28] It was decided that the Congress would support the League's Muslim candidates (though it also gave ticket to a few Muslims as well) and in return the League would give full support to the Congress.

The election campaign of 1959 reflects the internal configuration of this fragile coalition. For instance, the Congress manifesto relied heavily on the rhetoric of democracy, planning and nationalisation. Describing the Communist rule as a disruption in the otherwise linear story of planned development, the manifesto projected the 'nationalisation' as beneficial move for a cohesive social transformation. On the other hand, the Muslim League manifesto highlighted the exclusiveness of Muslim demands and promised to create more safeguards for the Muslims in the state (Sarker 1960). However, despite these two very different political agendas, the main unifying factor was anti-Communism. This practical adjustment turned out to be highly favourable for both the partners. The Congress contested election in 80 seats and won 63; it also managed to secure 45.37 per cent of votes ('Statistical Report on Kerala Assembly Elections' 1960). On the other hand, the Muslim League was also in an advantageous position. Although it fought election only in 12 assembly seats, it won 11 and got 47.79 per cent of votes in these seats (ibid.).

The post-election story was equally interesting. Since the Congress had a clear majority, it did not need League's support to form a government. Besides, there was an internal ideological pressure. Creating an open alliance with the League to oppose Communists as a common enemy could not entirely be described as a deviation from the stated ideology of 'socialistic pattern of society'. After all, the Muslim League had incorporated the 'socialistic pattern of society' in its ideology; and, Nehru himself had clearly worked out a difference between majority communalism and minority communalism.[29]

However, accommodating Muslim League in the cabinet as a legitimate partner was not at all an easy task. Muslim League had not given up its claim that it was the representative organisation of the Muslims of the state. It had also projected itself as a champion of Muslim cause in the elections (Sarker 1960). In this context, therefore, it was inevitable for both the partners to work out a suitable deal. Consequently, an appropriate formula was worked out: the Muslim League was given the speakership of the house and one Rajya Sabha seat and the Congress formed its own government! (Wright 1966)

This brief story of Muslim League's initial survival in Kerala should not either be seen as a narrative of corrupt communal politics of Muslim elites or a virtual defeat of secularism. Rather, we have to recognise a highly complex political configuration. The 'Muslim representation' in the 1960 Kerala assembly was a multi-layered phenomenon—apart from Muslim League, there were Muslim elected members of the CPI and the Congress as well. This aspect contradicts the League's claim to characterise itself as the sole representative body of Muslims. On the other hand, the League was not a loser either. It had not merely consolidated itself as a recognised political party but also managed to enter into the national parliament through Rajya Sabha. In other words, while it can undoubtedly be inferred that the Muslim voters of the Kerala did not merely vote for the Muslim candidates; or alternately, all the Muslims who contested elections were not exclusively committed to any stated or defined 'Muslim cause', it is certainly not possible to deny the legitimate existence of the Muslim League as a political player, which reinvented itself as an Indian political party.

## TWO FORMS OF MUSLIM REPRESENTATION: POLITICS AS A DISCOURSE

Our discussion on the moves and strategies fashioned by the Muslim League in southern India in the 1950s ought to be studied in a much wider perspective, especially in relation to the debate on Muslim representation. Two very relevant examples can be taken in this regard.

On 26 April 1947, Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi, founder of Jamat-e-Islami-Hind (JIH), delivered a very crucial speech at the annual convention of the organisation at Madras. Instead of discussing the promises of an Islamic state, Maudoodi dealt with this question of political possibilities in partitioned India, where Muslims would become a permanent religious minority. He suggested a four-point programme to Muslims—end of communal conflict, reforming of

Muslim society, increasing role of Muslim intellectuals and significance of regional languages. He says:

> Demands of proportional representation in assemblies, raising a hue and cry about elections, struggle for employment or cries of demand for community rights will not only be useless . . . but may also prove detrimental . . . confidence is to be reposed in the Hindu nationalist movement through our course of action that there is no other religion competing with them politically. The fear among them of another demand of Pakistan, by Muslims of an area where Islamic propagation is given increased opportunity, can only be removed in this manner. . . . Our workers . . . should learn local Indian languages. . . . If Muslims restrict themselves only to Urdu due to their religious prejudice; they will become strangers. . . . This is not only necessary for the sake of Non-Muslims but for the Muslims of future generation as well. Muslim children in the years to come will be exposed to the educational languages in schools and to the official languages outside schools. (Maudoodi 2009: 32)

My second example is perhaps more revealing. The Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind (JUH), a traditional collaborator of the Congress decided to call itself an 'apolitical entity'. In its annual meeting on 19 April 1949, the Jamiat passed a resolution to 'concentrate on the religious and cultural uplift of the Muslim masses of India' as a non-political body. According to a newspaper report:

> Speakers supporting the resolution referred to the political role of the Jamiat for over a century and said that its object had been fulfilled after the achievement of freedom. The Jamiat should, therefore, centralize its activities in spheres other than politics. The policy resolution emphasized that Muslims should be persuaded to learn the Devanagari script, and pamphlets and booklets explaining the fundamental principles of Islam be published in both scripts, Devanagari and Urdu for the development of better understanding among the Indian people. (Noorani 2003: 79–80)

This overtly *apolitical* gesture of two leading Muslim social-political organisations very clearly emphasises the fact that the conventional norms of Muslim politics—separate electorates, special privileges/weightage system, etc.—became highly contested in the 1950s. The Muslim groups very quickly realised that they had to operate in an evolving political system in which Muslim masses were to be identified *primarily* as secular citizens. Therefore, they had to rely on the 'community reform' as a preferred arena to rediscover new and perhaps more appropriate meanings of Muslim representation. This could be the reason why greater emphasis was given to the question of language.

However, this 'apolitical Muslim politics' was, in any case, not going to be an all-India phenomenon. We have seen the growth of the Muslim League in Kerala as a state-level political party, which despite being committed to the 'socialistic pattern of society', participated in the political process in the name of 'Muslim interests'. In fact, the 'community empowerment' turned out to be an acceptable idiom of Muslim politics in the south, in later years. How did these two apparently incongruous tendencies—apolitical politics of 'community reform' in the north and politics of 'community interest' in the south—survive?

One may argue that actual 'political manoeuvring' made it possible for the political players either to deviate from stated principles or work out favourable equilibriums for the sake of political benefits. This simplistic generalisation cannot solve our purpose. Political principles are always open to varied interpretations and therefore identifying one pure meaning of the terms like secularism and democracy is not justifiable. Thus, Muslim League's coalition with Congress in Kerala and JIH and JUH's apolitical politics signify two legitimate ways to interpret the principles on which the constitutional notion of representation is based.

League's electoral participation does not contradict the basic thrust of the Representation of the People's Act 1950. Theoretically, a group of people living in a territorially marked parliamentary or assembly constituency can undoubtedly elect a representative of their choice in an open electoral competition. In this sense, it is perfectly appropriate for a majority of Muslims living in a constituency to elect a Muslim MP/MLA. However, these elected Muslim representatives do not technically *represent* the 'Muslims community' mainly because the Islamic identity of the electorates is not legally recognised.[30] Thus, 'Muslim representation' in a formal sense corresponds to an official constitutional principle that electorates residing in a territorially defined constituency constitute a homogeneous community, whose political interests are identical and therefore it should be represented by its own member(s). Since this 'formal form of representation' was entirely contingent upon the actual numbers of Muslim voters living in a recognised constituency, the *delimitation of constituencies* emerged as the one of the most contentious aspects of Muslim politics of representation in later years.

The JIH and JUH's considered move to give up 'electoral politics', introduces us to another interesting form of representation. In this case, representation is understood in terms of 'Muslim presence', which corresponds to the constitutional identity given to Muslims as a religious minority. The speech delivered by Maudoodi very clearly underlines the possible ways in which a consolidated 'Muslim presence' could be evolved without stirring up the rhetoric of political protection.[31] Although JUH's move was not entirely against political participation (as it continued to encourage Muslims to participate in electoral politics), the agenda of community reform and protection of personal law and wakfs were conscious attempts to carve out a space for a rather 'informal form of representation' within the evolving apparatus of the state.

This 'informal form of representation' was compatible with Nehru's own meaning of politics. Nehru made a distinction between the techniques adopted during the freedom struggle against the British and the participation of people/groups in democracy.[32] In Nehru's framework, the independence was seen as a culmination point—not only for the agitational politics but also for realising the significance of responsive institutions (Chakrabarty 2005). He was keen to ensure that grievances of all kinds should be addressed in a systematic institutional and above all, participatory manner. In this sense, there was a possibility to recognise the Muslim organisations such as JUH as a legitimate institutional channel to accommodate 'Muslim opinion'. This official recognition transformed the Muslim groups, particularly religious-cultural organisations, into some kind of community representatives, who were supposed to 'represent' Muslim aspirations, grievances and sensitive matters of religious nature.

Unlike the formal electoral representation, the informal representation was not depending upon the participation of common Muslims as legitimate stakeholders. In this case, the 'Muslim presence' was to be evaluated differently: the actual number of Muslims in prestigious institutions, public bodies and decisions-making forums is calculated and compared with the total Muslim population of the country either to highlight the relative backwardness of the community or making an argument for the success of 'secularism'. Thus, Muslim political elites (presidents, vice presidents, cabinet ministers), Muslim professionals (civil servants, academics, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.), Muslim public personalities (film stars, sports persons, musicians, etc.) eventually become qualitative 'symbols' for assessing 'Muslim presence' in public life.

These two forms of Muslim representation bring us to the main argument of this chapter. Our discussion shows that the introduction of democratic politics—one person, one vote—offered new political opportunities to the Muslim communities to participate in the electoral process as citizens without giving up their Islamic/regional-cultural identity. These changing terms of political discourse forced the Muslim groups to redefine their agendas and strategies. Since they were unable to play out the secured 'Muslim vote' politics, a search for advantageous coalitions began. We also find that the reorganisation of the states created new possibilities for Muslim groups. The empirical realities at the regional levels helped them to consolidate politically as legitimate players; while the identification of all Muslims as a constitutional minority at the national level, gave them a vocabulary to translate region-specific political acts into sophisticated 'minority issues'. In this complex cultural-political milieu, a few India-specific forms of political representation evolved which were actually expressed through the constitutional language of minority rights. It could, therefore, be suggested that the portrayal of Muslims as rational political agents and/or Muslim politics merely as *communalism* is factually incorrect and analytically inappropriate. However, to make sense of the postcolonial Muslim politics as multi-layered discourse, we need to pay close attention to the ways in which 'formal' and 'informal' forms of Muslim representation is interpreted, defined and played out in later decades.

## NOTES

1. In his famous book, *India Wins Freedom*, Azad argues that partition has reduced the political capacity of Muslims. He writes: 'The only result of the creation of Pakistan was to weaken the position of the Muslims in the

subcontinent of India. The 45 million Muslims who have remained in India have been weakened. On the other hand, there is as yet no indication that a strong and efficient government can be established in Pakistan. If one judges the question only from the point of view of the Muslim community, can anybody deny today that Pakistan has been for them a very unfortunate and unhappy development?' (Azad 1988: 247–48).

2. Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India, also wrote to Nehru: 'Muslims citizens in India have a responsibility to remove the doubts and misgivings entertained by a large section of the people about their loyalty founded largely on their past association with the demand for Pakistan and the unfortunate activities of some of them' (Guha 2007: 105).

3. Golwalakar says: 'Muslims are busy hatching a dangerous plot, piling up arms and mobilising their men and probably biding their time to strike from within when Pakistan decides upon an armed conflict with our country. And when they do strike, it is very likely that even Delhi may be rocked to its foundations unless we wake up in time to nip the mischief in the bud' (Golwalkar 1966: 147).

4. Although it is true that Azad, and for that matter, the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind (JUH) campaigned for a 'secular' political participation of Muslims, the social heterogeneity or the plurality of Muslim political responses were always discouraged and ignored. For Paul Brass, this attitude of Muslim elite characterises a 'defensive' politics (Brass 1974: 273–74).

5. One finds various shades of this argument in the writings of Hasan (1997) and Shakir (1972). Although these authors do recognise a crucial distinction between Muslim elites and the common Muslims, the methods used by Muslim leaders and socio-political groups to mobilise Muslim masses are completely missing in their analyses.

6. According to Mushirul Hasan, '. . . the co-option of Congress Muslims in governmental structures constricted their ability to keep up their links with large segments of the Muslim population . . . they frittered away the opportunity presented to them. . . . Instead, they settled for a soft option. Having been integrated into the vast Congress Party machinery and assured of Nehru's backing, they developed a vested interest in defending the status quo' (Hasan 1990).

7. For instance, Mushirul Hasan writes: 'Mohammad Ali Jinnah believed he had all the answers. So did the Jamaat-i Islami (JIH). But there were other explanations as well, boldly constructed around secular and pluralist conceptions and counter posed to an essentialist view of Indian Islam' (Hasan 1995). No one can deny the basic thrust of this comment. However, the way in which Jinnah and the JIH are equated is equally problematic. It would be analytically misleading to ignore JIH's criticism of Jinnah in the 1940s.

8. The recent literature on Partition of India also suffers from this problem. One finds a strange tendency in recent writings that whatsoever had happened in the 1950s could legitimately be evoked to make sense of the postcolonial politics of/on Muslims. For instance, Vazira Zamindar writes: '. . . . to this day a spectrum of political opinion, from those fighting for a secular vision of India to those who imagine it as essentially Hindu, continue to draw upon different understanding of and lesson from Partition to argue for Muslim inclusion or exclusion in their imaginings of modern India' (Zamindar 2007: 238). Of course, Partition has been an important signifier of modern Indian politics, however, at the same time, the regional contextual complexities and political structures of different kinds should not be underestimated.

9. Kaviraj makes a very interesting argument. He says: '. . . it is not always appreciated how difficult it is to deliver on the abstract promise of "subaltern studies"—to drag up from the ruins of everyday life pieces of subaltern experience, then to find a language to express them and finally to theorize on the basis of the distinctiveness of that angle of vision' (Kaviraj 2010: 4).

10. Anne Philips's work, *The Politics of Presence* (1995) is very productive for making this distinction.

11. The 1946 Election manifesto of the Congress says: '. . . The Central Legislative Assembly is a body with no power or authority and is practically an advisory body whose advice has been constantly flouted and ignored. It is completely out of date and is based on a very restricted franchise. . . . Yet, the Congress has decided to contest the elections to show . . . the opinion of the voters on the issue of Independence' (cf. Azad 1988: 132).

12. The Schedule II of the Government of India Act 1919 is an interesting example. The schedule divides electorates into various religious categories as per the constituencies (urban/rural; Muslim/non-Muslims) but sets out similar set of qualifications for being an electorate (residential requirement, property, tax status, pension). See Government of India Act 1919.

13. The Election Report of 1951–52 says: 'Given a simple enough system of ballot which he (voter) understands, he can be trusted to cast his vote intelligently in accordance with his own free will in favour of the representative of his choice. It is essential, however, that in order that the system of adult suffrage may work fairly and smoothly, two other conditions must be satisfied *viz.*, (1) the conduct of elections must be strictly non-partisan or under neutral control, and (2) the executive government must sincerely desire free and fair elections and actively work for the same' ('Report on the First General Elections' 1954: 17).

14. In one of his letters, Nehru says: 'Democracy originally was thought of in smaller terms and was presumably effective. I just do not know what our elections will lead us or the country to, but simpler they are the better' (Nehru n.d., 15: 241).

15. The principles of democratic representation, which were laid down by the Constitution and subsequently elaborated by the Representation of the People Act 1950, provided broad guidelines for the spatial demarcation of constituencies. However, the government found the 1941 Census quite old for the purpose of delimitation of electoral units. To deal with this problem, the Census Commissioner was asked to prepare population estimates (Morris-Jones 1957: 95). On the basis of these estimates, 489 Lok Sabha constituencies were marked. To accommodate reserved seats (72 seats reserved for SC and 27 for ST), three types of constituencies were created: 314 single-member constituencies, 86-double-member constituencies and one three-member constituency (which had reservation for both SC and ST) ('Report on the First General Elections' 1954).

16. Khalidi (1998) and Zamindar (2007) show that the migration of population continued to play a significant role in the emerging political/administrative systems in India and Pakistan. Interestingly, the 1951 elections and the debates on the inclusions of refugees in the voters' lists have not been given any attention in these works.

17. Ahmad was critical of the 'election studies' in India. In an article published in 1977, he argues: 'Election studies . . . have failed to equip us with any expertise either in the anticipation and prediction of electoral outcomes or in understanding electoral processes generally' (Ahmad 1977).

18. There is a vast literature on the unification of states, including the official documents released by the Government of India in the 1950s (Noorani 2013). I recognise the political complexities of this process and precisely for this reason, avoid unqualified sweeping generalisations. Yet, my purpose here is to underline the contextual specificity of that moment, particularly the difference between the constitutional idea of India and the regional realities of 1950s.

19. Holden Furber talks about three stages of the unification process. (*a*) July and August 1947: The States Ministry persuaded the leading princes to 'accede' to the Union with respect first of all to the three essentials-defence, foreign affairs and communications; (*b*) 1948–49: The object was to show the wisdom of the plans for the 'unions', to prove that, in order to make them work, a far larger delegation of power was necessary; (*c*) 1949–50: The object was to accomplish full integration by having the rulers agree to accept the new Constitution of India as the constitution of their states; such acceptance meant recognition by the accepting state or newly-formed 'union of states' that its constitutional position in the Republic was the same as that of the Part A states, the former provinces of 'British India' (Furber 1951).

20. Rajni Kothari also underlines this point. He identifies four main factors that affected the political development in the states: pre-Independence

political configuration, the nature and strength of the 'opposition' to the Congress, intra-state diversity, and the difference in the social structure in the region (Kothari 1970b: 122).

21. The nature of communal- and/or caste-based politics in Princely States also affected the dynamic of regional politics in later years. For excellent analysis of this aspect, see Kooiman (1995).

22. It is worth recalling the story of the Indian Union Muslim League in the post-Partition period. The Resolution passed by the Muslim League's Council Meeting (Karachi, 1947), clearly legitimised the existence of a new political party—the Indian Union Muslim League (Pirzada 1970: 575). In January 1950, a Muslim Convection held in Madras to work out future strategy of the Party. After a long debate on the emerging political system, it was decided to rewrite the Constitution of the Party (Noorani 2003: 99). Finally, on 1 September 1951, the Indian Union Muslim League adopted a new Constitution (ibid.).

23. Gyanendra Pandey captures this sense of insecurity among Muslims of north India in his analysis of Muslim citizenship. His argument also underlines the fact that the regional variations also played a much greater role in communal politics (Pandey 1999).

24. The Madras Muslim League—a regional branch of the India Union Muslim League—was officially recognised by the Election Commission as a state party in 1951.

25. Most of the delegates, who attended the Madras Convection of the Party on 14 January 1950 including the MLA Abdul Hameed Khan who also presided the Convention, argued that in the 'present political framework there was no place for communal political parties. Though Muslims had grievances because of the abolition of reservation and separate electorates, as realists they should recognize that no purpose would now be served by reservation' (Noorani 2003: 99).

26. The Resolution passed by the Working Committee of the Party in its meeting held on 21–22 October 1956 is very relevant here. Authorising the President of the League 'to enter into any alliance or agreement with other parties whose aims and objects did not conflict with those of the League', it was resolved that the League should set up its candidates in the forthcoming elections in such constituencies as it might select for the purpose. It further notes: 'in the constituencies, where Muslim League candidates could not be set up, the League might extend its support to independent and other party candidates, excepting those of the Hindu Mahasabha and Jan Sangh'. Interestingly, the League supported the 'socialistic pattern of society' but expressed, 'strong exception to the attitude taken by the Congress in general and its high command in particular, towards the Muslims as a community and their aspirations' (Noorani 2003: 110–11).

27. League was a marginalised player in Kerala till 1957. In the assembly election it had to present its eighteen candidates as Independents because it was not recognised by the Election Commission (Wright 1966).

28. Apart from the PSP and the Muslim League, the other two state level non-Communists parties, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) were also part of this anti-Communist coalition. However, RSP and KSP were left out of the coalition and this alliance was finally called the Triple Alliance. The League was the most junior partner of the alliance because most of the seats were shared by the Congress and the PSP (Sarker 1960). I only concentrate on the relationship between the Congress and the League here simply to underline the specificity of Muslim politics.

29. In the open session of the All India Congress Committee, on 11 May 1958, Nehru said: 'The communalism of the majority is far more dangerous than the communalism of minority because it wears the grab of nationalism. We have thus communalism ingrained in us and it comes out quite quickly at the slightest provocation and even decent people begin to behave like barbarians when this communalism is aroused in them' (Noorani 2003: 316).

30. This had been a very delicate issue in the 1950s. The 'Report on the First General Election' underlines this point very clearly. It notes: '. . . the Diwakar Committee set up by the Constituent Assembly recommended that no person should be required to furnish information relating to his religion or caste in any public document. The question of including, a column for religion or caste in the electoral rolls was, therefore, reconsidered in the light of these decisions. As the information included in the electoral rolls regarding the caste of a voter could not in any case be taken by itself as sufficient or dependable evidence of the voter's right to stand for election to a reserved seat and as the proposal to reserve seats in the Legislatures for Muslims and Christians had been abandoned, the State Governments were directed, to delete this column from the electoral rolls. All the States did not readily accept this direction. In fact, Madras strongly opposed it and, in the first electoral rolls prepared under the Constitution, retained this column. The main argument advanced in support of this was that inclusion in the electoral rolls of information as to the religion and caste of a voter would be very helpful in identifying him at the time of poll. In accordance with the directions of the Election Commission, however, this column was ultimately deleted when the rolls were next revised' ('Report on the First General Elections' 1954: 62–63).

31. Although Moudoodi migrated to Pakistan and a separate organisation JIH was established in 1948 in India, these suggestive outlines had a direct impact on the activities of JIH in the 1950s. Two examples are interesting:

(a) JIH asked its members and whole timers to abstain from electoral politics, both as candidates and as voters; (b) The Jamat adopted its new constitution in 1956, which states its rather reformulated objective as 'divine pleasure and success in the Hereafter' (Jamaat-e-Islami n.d.). For a detailed analysis of the trajectories of JIH in postcolonial India, see Ahmad (2011).

32. Commenting of the relevance of satyagrah for the Punjabi Suba, Nehru said: 'I cannot say that nobody should ever do satyagraha. It is possible that it may be necessary sometimes. But to go on hunger strike or undertake satyagraha over day-to-day problems, whether it is a political problem or an industrial or labour dispute, is absolutely wrong. I want you to realise that it weakens us politically. . . . This is worth considering because an independent nation which is advancing, and is no longer immature, has to adopt different methods of working' (cf. Chakrabarty 2005).

## Chapter 14

# 'The Jewel of the East Yet Has Its Flaws'

## The Deceptive Tranquillity Surrounding Sri Lankan Independence[1]

Harshan Kumarasingham

*This chapter investigates the period before Sri Lanka was engulfed by civil war and ethnic strife and how things changed so rapidly following colonial rule. Sri Lanka's independence was seen as a model to be followed in the decolonisation of the British Empire due to the island's peace, prosperity, indigenous leadership and its preference for British institutions. However, behind this façade the years surrounding Sri Lankan independence also saw the foundations for the vicious civil war that has dominated all recent coverage of this Indian Ocean state. This article assesses how warning signs were misread or ignored and how early political decisions in this era forged the beginnings of the future problems ahead.*

In May 2009, the Sri Lankan military defeated the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (better known as the Tamil Tigers) after a savage civil war that paralysed the island for almost 30 years and left thousands of civilian casualties. Though the military conflict is over, tensions remain across all communities with many unresolved issues, grievances and injustices simmering at all levels and little significant rebuilding or reconciliation to allay fears of future discord. News reports on Sri Lanka over the past 30 years showed a state beset by intractable problems and unrelenting violence with little hope of lasting peace. It was not always like this. Sri Lanka was in fact seen as a place of cordial relations between all communities, economic and social opportunity and a land mercifully bereft of brutality and disorder when independence from Britain came in February 1948. This chapter examines how and why Sri Lanka was seen in this light as a model to be followed in the decolonisation of British Empire. It will also survey the years surrounding independence when conditions were established for the future conflict that would ravage the island indelibly.

Britain's first High Commissioner to Sri Lanka,[2] Sir Walter Hankinson, dispatched to London his reflections on the island's affairs just over a year after Independence,

> There have been no startling changes in the domestic political scene; there have been no disturbances among any section of the population; there have been no sudden or sharp alterations in any of the institutions of Government; there have up to the present been no untoward changes in the economic situation. . . . Nearly all the public institutions, Governmental and other in Ceylon, are based on English models, laid down often many decades ago by the Colonial administration. The result is that an appearance startlingly familiar to English eyes is presented by the political scene. The Cabinet, the House of Representatives, the manner in which Parliamentary business is transacted and relationship of the Civil Service to the political executive all follow the English model. This combined with good relations prevailing between Europeans and Ceylonese has produced an atmosphere in which an English observer feels almost strangely at home.[3]

Across the Palk Strait, up in New Delhi, came a very different picture. Sir Archibald Nye, who prior to Independence had been Governor of Madras, expressed consternation and foreboding in his report as British High Commissioner, written the same month as Hankinson. Nye's assessment of young independent India included phrases like 'fissiparous tendencies', 'little discipline throughout the country', 'communal butchery', 'since the transfer of power one crisis has followed another', 'nepotism and corruption were rife in almost all grades of society'. For the disapproving Nye, India was governed by ministers 'who spent most of their working lives as agitators . . . who had little or no administrative experiences' and believed the one major qualification for office seemed to be in many cases 'an adequate period spent in jail'. Government across this former prized possession of the British Empire appeared in vast swathes of territory to 'be unable to carry on owing to the breakdown of law and order'.[4]

Despite such early confidence from the British High Commissioner the seeds of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, one of the bloodiest and longest-running civil wars in the world, were sown during the colonial era and started to grow within just 10 years of Independence. Nye's critical description of India would, within a few decades, be more apt when applied to Sri Lanka. However, few at the time predicted such outcomes.

## MODEL COLONY

Sri Lanka in British and international eyes had always been seen as the Model Colony. The path to Independence was quite different from India's. Sri Lanka's inter-communal elite, steeped like their brethren in the Indian National Congress (INC) in English law and history, sought greater self-government through constitutional concessions from the imperial power. However, unlike the INC, which under Gandhi's mystical thrall and political astuteness, would eventually break from its gradualist roots towards mass movement and disobedience, the Ceylon National Congress, founded in 1919, remained committed to more autonomy within the Empire. The anglophile elite of Sinhalese, Tamils and other minorities were remarkably successful in securing political advancement for the island. From 1833 the Legislative Council, an appointed body, gave modest representation to the island's communities to advise the Governor. By 1911, one member was now elected to the Legislative Council—the first elected member Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was a prominent member of the Tamil minority. The election of the silver-tongued and silver-spooned Ramanathan and that of his scholarly brother Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam as the inaugural president of the Ceylon National Congress 8 years later seemed to augur well for minority relations with the Sinhalese majority, and make a powerful inter-communal vanguard for Independence. Arunachalam's successor as president, the erudite Sinhalese Sir James Peiris, could confidently proclaim at this time that the 'past few years have shown us that the Sinhalese and the Tamils are one people. The struggle we are entering today will cement that union stronger and stronger' (Kumarasingham 2006: 345). Further reforms came to the island's shores. In 1931, Sri Lanka achieved the commendable boast of being the first colony in the British Empire outside the 'white Dominions' to have universal suffrage—well before India. The Donoughmore Constitution established this electoral feat and introduced a governance scheme, not on the expected cabinet-government model, but instead through a system of executive committees based on the London County Council to fill the State Council, which replaced the Legislative Council.

For Sri Lankan politics, however, the most pertinent development from Donoughmore Constitution was the abolition of communal representation. The Donoughmore Report famously described communalism in Sri Lanka as a 'canker on the body politic . . . poisoning the new growth of political consciousness and effectively preventing the development of a national or corporate spirit'. The Report endorsed by the Colonial Office postulated that for Sri Lanka there could be 'no hope of binding together the diverse elements of the population in a realisation of their common kinship and an acknowledgment of common obligations to the country of which they are all citizens so long . . . communal representation, with all its disintegrating influences, remains a feature of the constitution' (Colonial Office 1928: 18–39). The British judged the abolition of communal representation would foster modern democracy along European lines and remove the shackles of eastern parochialism identified with communal identity.

Instead of using the opportunity of World War II to wrest power from a vulnerable imperial power or create havoc like the 1942 Quit India Movement the Sri Lankan elite leadership almost unanimously responded to the wartime conditions with full support. Sri Lanka, due to its strategic position and resources, became a crucial colony in the Allied cause and under the Commander-in-Chief Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton the civil administration effectively gave way to military needs. After the fall of Malaya, Sri Lanka provided over 60 per cent of the Allies' rubber supplies and from April 1944 the South-East Asian Command under Lord Mountbatten was run from Kandy. The Board of Ministers (made of the chairs of the executive committees) decided to support Mountbatten, Layton and Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott in their war aims. This move naturally endeared the Sri Lankan leadership to Britain, who on the outbreak of war had initially embargoed further reform till the war's completion. With the active support of Mountbatten, Layton and Caldecott the Board of Ministers, effectively under D. S. Senanayake 'never ceased to emphasise the value of Ceylon's contribution to the war effort and continually pressed the British to commit themselves to political reform' (Ashton 2001: 460–61). Senanayake himself wrote to the Colonial Secretary, George Hall, in August 1945, to stress the point:

> I hope it will not be forgotten that the orders for the surrender of Japanese troops in Malaya and Burma are being sent from the capital of the last Sinhalese kings, that the fleet which stream into Singapore streamed out of Trincomalee, and the aircraft which patrol the skies of Malaya and Sumatra are based on Ceylon.[5]

Due to their co-operation (and pressure) the Colonial Office sent the Soulbury Commission in 1944 to Colombo to devise constitutional reforms. The Board of Ministers were adamant that full Independence was their objective, but they were equally resolute that Sri Lankan independence meant the status akin to the white Dominions—a cabinet-based parliamentary system within the Commonwealth. In September 1945, the report recommended for Sri Lanka a Westminster model *par excellence*—a unitary bicameral parliamentary system. Executive power would rest with a cabinet headed by a prime minster and appointed by a governor-general who had special powers concerning defence and external affairs. There would be a 101 member House of Representatives of which 95 were elected by a majoritarian voting system and the remaining six nominated by the Governor-General. The Senate would have typical checking powers, but lacked a veto, and would have 15 members selected by the Governor-General and 15 elected by the Lower House. The Governor-General was empowered through these provisions to protect minority groups by ensuring their representation and preventing majority community dominance in parliament and policy. Legally the colonial justice system already used, along with English Common Law, existing indigenous customary laws: Buddhist Ecclesiastical law, Kandyan law, Muslim law, the Thesavalamai laws of the Jaffna Tamils and even the Roman Dutch law kept from preceding colonial rule of the Netherlands. Minority rights were further to be protected by a clause prohibiting any legislation that discriminated against any ethnicity, language or religion unless a two-thirds majority could be mustered in the House of Representatives. These recommendations largely corresponded to the wishes of D. S. Senanayake and the Board of Ministers. Acculturated through elite instruction and often British education, the Sri Lankan elite would only settle for the British Westminster model.

The Soulbury Report recognised this:

> It must be borne in mind that a number of the political leaders of Ceylon have been educated in England and have absorbed British political ideas. When they demand responsible government, they mean government on the British parliamentary model and are apt to resent any deviation from it as derogatory to their status as fellow citizens of the British Commonwealth of Nations and as conceding something less than they consider their due. To put it more colloquially, what is good enough for the British people is good enough for them. (Colonial Office 1945: 110)

The Board of Ministers also took advantage of the extra earnings taken during the war years from the Allied demand for its raw materials, ports, industry and manpower. Sri Lanka's politicians used this windfall to establish the foundations of a welfare state. In particular, D. S. Senanayake as Minister of Agriculture directed large-scale developments in irrigation and fertility that benefited many peasants through cultivation of previously arid land while the 1943 Report of the Minister of Education, C. W. W. Kannangara, paved the way for universal and compulsory free education for all citizens from kindergarten to university level. This would lead to Sri Lanka having one of the highest literacy rates and educational standards in Asia. The development and demand for Sri Lanka's resources and services during the war led to the remarkable fact of almost zero unemployment in the years 1942–45. Social legislation was enacted during these years that established health care, state-insurance, a minimum wage and food subsidies. Though not without problems, Sri Lanka with its relatively high standards of living became one of the most envied places in Asia and the British Empire (De Silva 2005: 570–89). The foundations of an Asian welfare state seemed to fulfil some of the expectations for Sri Lankan society seen in the historical works of indigenous high liberals like Sir James de Alwis and later Ananda Coomaraswamy (Bayly 2012: 339).

D. S. Senanayake seemed to proclaim the maturity of the Sri Lanka's persuasive claim to Independence compared to other less loyal parts of the British Empire,

> There has been no rebellion in Ceylon, no Non-Co-operation Movement and no fifth-column: we were among the peoples who gave full collaboration while Britain was hard-pressed. . . . We cannot offer you a rebel general—the experience of South Africa and Burma seems to suggest that it would be easier if we could—but we do suggest that an act of faith and generosity . . . will cement the bonds between our people. It will indeed do more. It will add to the powers of the British Commonwealth of Nations.[6]

Reassuringly for the British and their allies the United National Party (UNP), under Senanayake, formed from the Ceylon National Congress, was firmly committed to withstand Soviet and communist influence and keep the island's critical bases under British control after Independence. The UNP in the elections 1947 was able to prevent the highly cohesive communist parties at bay and take office in preparation to receive the reins of power.

Therefore, unlike most independence movements in the British Empire, Sri Lanka was able to gain sovereignty territorially intact without violence or even ill-will towards the departing colonial power. The documenting doyen of transfers of power in the Commonwealth, Nicholas Mansergh, captured the perception and the reality of this legalist approach taken by the Ceylonese elite instead of the more populist mass movements seen elsewhere in the Empire.

> . . . ardent nationalists from other less peaceful lands might allude in tones of some condescension to Ceylon's fight for freedom, but the gentlemanly pressure for independence exerted by its conservative nationalist leaders upon Whitehall made up in good sense what it lacked in political passion. As a result Ceylon acquired the status of a dominion of the British Commonwealth without bitterness, by orderly constitutional advance which made the manner of its attainment a source of unfailing satisfaction to British constitutional historians and status in the academic world that of a model dominion. (Mansergh 1958: 246)

Not long after Mansergh wrote this evaluation of Sri Lanka's Independence and its worthiness of replication of the 'model dominion' would spew forth the first of many fiery riots that would intensify on each occasion over the years until the wisdom of such assessments became ridiculed. Those foreign observers closer to the ground were beginning to see the false confidence. Not even three years after the glowing report from the first British High Commissioner in Colombo, mentioned previously, his successor, Sir Cecil Syers, was already sensing the fallibility of the earlier assurances.

Ceylon must not be judged by Western standards. The political and social scenes are as treacherous to the European observer as the climate. Outwardly bright and gay, they have hidden and dangerous depths. To change the metaphor, the jewel of the East yet has its flaws.[7]

## A FLAWED INDEPENDENCE

Contrasting Sri Lanka's situation to India (and Burma) had been a successful strategy to negotiate Independence. In order to quell any suspicions of Sinhalisation of Sri Lanka, which could have delayed Independence, Senanayake famously appealed to the Tamils and other smaller ethnic groups in a widely reported speech to the State Council in 1945 that somewhat reassured the minorities and Mandarins at Whitehall.

> For centuries the Sinhalese and the Tamils have lived together in peace and amity. We have been governed by their kings and they by ours. I cannot believe that they are solidly behind the reactionary elements which have seized the headlines. What is the good of six pages of long-winded resolutions at the stage of our history [referring to Tamil Congress leader G. G. Ponnambalam's appeal to the British to deny independence until more minority guarantees had been made]. I put this question bluntly to my Tamil friends. Do you want to be governed from London or do you want, as Ceylonese, to help govern Ceylon? I appeal to them not to let the ambition of a few politicians stand in the way of the freedom of our dear Lanka. Shall the most ancient of our civilisations sink to the level of dull and dreary negation? We all know and admire their special qualities. They are essential to the welfare of this Island, and I ask them to come over and help us.[8]

There was no reason to doubt Senanayake's genuineness in this speech. Senanayake as the preeminent national leader of the country believed in Sri Lanka's ability to govern alone and in the need for all its communities to work together. Despite his patrician and wealthy background and devotion to his Buddhist faith this bucolic Sinhalese squire never strayed in his articulation of Sri Lankan nationalism against the temptations of communal rhetoric. In a debate concerning communal representation Senanayake claimed that 'I don't care if they're all Tamils, provided they are elected as Ceylonese' (Jennings 1955, 1956: 18). Though obviously an example of parliamentary hyperbole, Senanayake once installed as the nation's first prime minister formed a cabinet that prefigured consociationalism by numerically representing the main communities. As will be explored further in this chapter, despite the nobility of Senanayake's sentiment it would prove difficult to hold his successors to such views.

Sri Lankan Independence on 4 February 1948 came with peace, prosperity and no partition under an avuncular reliable leader. D. S. Senanayake in his Independence Day broadcast as prime minister stressed the calm and continuity of the transfer of power,

> . . . there are no refugees crossing Elephant pass, the Ceylon Light Infantry is organising a party to welcome its Colonel-in-Chief, and the only explosions we shall hear will be those of the fireworks . . . independence had been achieved without bloodshed and with no more controversy than was to be expected in so complicated and delicate a process as the framing of a new Constitution. That we owe in part to the British people. They have taken longer than we wished, and I for one have had to say hard things about them in the past, but they have lived up to the liberal traditions of a great people.[9]

However, beneath the veneer of continuity and tranquillity lay very deep problems. The Ceylon National Congress was undoubtedly an elite organisation and never succeeded (if it had really attempted) in becoming a mass movement that excited and mobilised the masses in the fashion of Gandhi's revitalised INC in the 1930s. Organisationally it even failed to represent the elites it so clearly identified with. Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam and other minority members, like some Muslims, left the Congress in the early 1920s over a dispute regarding territorial representation. They regarded the moves away from 'Balanced Representation' to territorial representation as one that would establish the dominance of the majority community.

The Tamils, Muslims and other groups, including the Sinhalese, founded and pursued with greater vigour ethnicity- and religion-based parties. Thus over quarter of a century before Independence, the Ceylon National Congress and its successor, the UNP, could not fairly claim to be the carrier of pan-Sri Lankan national aspirations. The Congress movement was 'both artificial and ephemeral' even before the split (De Silva 1984: 112). With Congress no longer acting convincingly as a comprehensive and nationalist organisation or its successor no other party was truly capable of being a truly inter-communal party—with the possible exception of the communists, who the British to the local elites had no intention of transferring power.

As the Cold War enveloped international thinking Senanayake was shrewdly able to dangle the socialist sword of Damocles over Britain's head when they raised objections over the preparedness of Sri Lanka for Independence. Writing to a sympathetic Lord Soulbury, and knowing that its contents would be passed to the Colonial Office, Senanayake complained that if power was not transferred soon he would lose his majority to the communists who had already 'published a complete rejection of Dominion status' and who believed in withdrawal from the Commonwealth and expulsion of the British from the bases.[10] The same day as Senanayake's letter on 5 October 1945 Soulbury himself had written to the Colonial Office of the dangers of neglecting Senanayake's claims to office. Soulbury argued that Senanayake was losing ground in the State Council to 'more extreme and less responsible members of the Board of Ministers, under the leadership of Mr. Bandaranaike'. The former Conservative minister told the Colonial Secretary that unless concessions were made the more reliable Senanayake, who had 'passed the prime of life', could be the victim of 'manoeuvring to oust him from the leadership'.[11] George Hall and his successor at the Colonial Office Arthur Creech-Jones were persuaded by the value of transacting the transfer with an indigenous leader in the person of Senanayake that would maintain British defence, commercial and political interests in the island over the heads of those perceived as being less amenable. Senanayake and Soulbury had a very close relationship that would culminate with the Soulbury Commission's author being offered the Governor-Generalship of Sri Lanka just a year after Independence on the personal recommendation by Senanayake himself.

The British had in effect based Independence upon their faith in one individual to keep the peace and maintain the constitutional settlement. Senanayake and his reassuring creed were seen at the best bet. This was repeated before and after in the British Empire. Senanayake, of course, was not the 'sole spokesman' for any community that Jinnah could claim for the Muslims and nor was he the head of a great national party and movement like Nehru. The 'George Washington of Ceylon', as Senanayake was described by the American State Department, instead made his appeal to the British by being a figure more closely linked to the mould of a traditional Dominion Prime Minister found in Canada, Australia or New Zealand. Patrick Gordon Walker reporting back to the Attlee Cabinet from the Independence Day celebrations that Sri Lanka's first prime minister 'is in the genuine tradition of Dominion Prime Ministers: deeply committed to the British connexion'.[12] That great exemplar of that traditional mould, Sir Robert Menzies, described Senanayake as part of the 'Commonwealth family' (Menzies 1955, 1956: 10)—a tribute he would have never have given to Nehru for example, who for the Australian Prime Minister, represented the dissolution of the values of the 'British' Commonwealth—the long-running antipathy between the two was mutual. Arguably the peculiar provision in the constitution that the Prime Minister would also hold the Defence and External Affairs portfolios demonstrated the faith the British had in the first holder of the premiership in guarding their interests and the transactional nature of the transfer of power.[13] To underline this, independence negotiations were largely made on the Sri Lankan side by just three people. Apart from Senanayake the other two were Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, a canny operator and civil service panjandrum and Sir Ivor Jennings, a Cambridge don in public law and constitutional expert, who had come to Sri Lanka as the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon in 1942. Goonetilleke and Jennings, however, were completely under the command of Senanayake. Jennings, who apart from Sri Lanka's, would go on to a play a leading role in the constitutions of Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia and the Maldives, modestly in terms of his own expert involvement, wrote how much 'Ceylon owes to Mr. [D. S.] Senanayake and to Sir Oliver Goonetilleke. But for them Ceylon would still be a colony' (Jennings 1953: x). The elitist enterprise that was Sri Lankan Independence was highlighted by the fact that unlike India, Independence came legally not by an Act of

Parliament, but as De Silva points out, a 'mere Order-in-Council' (De Silva 1977: 3–5). An Act would have required more time and deliberation, and the Senanayake & Co. were impatient. However, even after Independence, once again in contrast to India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka saw no need to establish a Constituent Assembly to mould a national document through deliberations with representatives of the whole country.

D. S. Senanayake was able through his largely successful stewardship of the state to dismiss any need for such Indian methods or constitutional contemplations. As Jennings, a great admirer, described him the 'bluff old farmer' who had 'never passed Matriculation' was nonetheless a highly capable operator who got on with things 'forcefully and decisively' leaving the details to others (Jennings 1955, 1956: 10, 18–20). Under his premiership 1948–52 the strategy seemed to work. There were no communal riots, no disorder, no resorting to dictatorship or military rule and no thought of secession. Instead Sri Lanka under Senanayake took an important part in world affairs, the Colombo Plan being the highlight; there were economically prosperous times especially due to the Korean War's demand for local goods; living and educational standards continued to rise; the (inter-communal) cabinet and country accepted the leadership of the prime minister; his political opponents including the communists seemed incapable of threatening the country or the treasury benches; the political system while criticised was seen to have sufficient safeguards, and all groups, though not without occasional grumbling believed in a united Sri Lanka. However, there were signs of the problems ahead that began simmering after Senanayake's death in 1952 and before the sea change of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, which launched the first serious episodes of communal violence that paralysed the country for decades after. Before examining the most prominent manifestation of national crisis—the Tamil–Sinhalese conflict, it is worth looking at the other political and social issues in this period, which did not augur well for the Sri Lankan future.

## POST-INDEPENDENCE POLITICS BEFORE COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

> Then came freedom. But how did freedom come? It came not after a fight upon definite principled policies and programmes, but it really

> came in the normal course of events, that is, attempts to persuade Commissions sent from England to grant this little bit or that little bit extra, and, finally, in the wake of freedom that was granted to countries like India, Pakistan and Burma, our Soulbury Constitution was altered to extend to us the same type of Dominion Status. There was no fight for that freedom which involved a fight for principles, policies and programmes which could not be carried out unless that freedom was obtained. No. It just came overnight. We just woke up one day and we were told, "You are a dominion now". (Ludowyk 1966: 204)

These were the words of Oxford-educated Sinhalese S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who had been a front-rank politician since the 1920s. Continuity was the goal of the new leaders. The Governor-General, Chief Justice, Commander of the Armed Forces remained British and even British planters sat in the new House of Representatives. Sri Lanka aspired to the parliamentary ideals of the Palace of Westminster. A critical element, which makes the Westminster system work, was absent however. Political parties in Sri Lanka were based on personalities not policies. The fact that independence was largely a personal transaction and not a mass movement rendered the party-political system a secondary concern. Parties themselves were largely personalist or single-issue entities that either proved incapable or unwilling to of appealing beyond their sectional interests. The fragility of the transfer was such that even the political reach of D. S. Senanayake was limited. Rather than trounce the opposition in elections of August–September 1947 in preparation for Independence as the man who delivered freedom, Senanayake was forced to cobble together a coalition of smaller parties and independents to his recently formed UNP to make a bare majority and thus form a government. If the Yamuna Conference of opposition parties had succeeded in uniting, Senanayake and UNP could not only have been denied office, but the Commonwealth could have had its first Trotskyist Prime Minister in Dr N. M. Perera, who instead became Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Even 10 years after Independence the Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan recorded during a visit that Sri Lanka had no conventional party system on British ideals and instead politics revolved on families, which to this historically minded premier resembled a previous English political era since 'in a curious way, the political life is more like that of Whig politics in the eighteenth century than one would suppose. The leading figures have a "following" (like the Bedfords or the Rockinghams)' (Macmillan 2011, II: 91). The Sri Lankan versions of these great aristocratic political families were the Senanayakes and the Bandaranaikes. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike would leave the Senanayake government in 1951 and form his own party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). A key reason for the establishment of the SLFP was the removal of Bandaranaike as Heir Presumptive to Senanayake since Bandaranaike thought the prime minister would engineer the succession for his own family. Well before the Nehru-Gandhis or the Bhuttos, Sri Lanka practised the political art of keeping power within the family. Inder Malhotra rightly describes Sri Lanka as the 'birthplace of dynastic rule in the subcontinent' and 'pace-setter' for entrenching political power within the family—a practice that continues (Malhotra 2003). Without mirth a member of the Bandaranaike family could claim that the occupation of the seat of power was 'a game of musical chairs by which a Bandaranaike (SLFP) or a Senanayake (UNP) can alternatively come to power' (Jupp 1978: 47). The UNP was known as the uncle-nephew party—with two of D. S. Senanayake's nephews becoming prime minister, not to forget his own son Dudley, there is truth to the epithet. Aside from the premiership, Cabinet also was a natural repository for the family. Lacking the disciplined whipped loyalties of a modern party prime ministers looked instead to their own families for reliance. The blood bonds of family were unquestionably thicker than the watery ones of political parties. This was the case with smaller parties also where the reliance of personalities was equally pronounced such as the communists under Dr S. A. Wickramasinghe, Dr N. M. Perera's LSSP, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam's Federal Party and G. G. Ponnambalam's Tamil Congress. As Woodward's study of the party scene in early post-Independent Sri Lanka concluded parties were based on 'a group of ambitious men who have chosen politics as a vocation and who seek personal success' (Woodward 1969: 19). Though this was not true of all politicians the argument is a symptom of an unhealthy democratic party system.

The death of D. S. Senanayake in March 1952 brought to the open the fragility of Westminster conventions and the applicability to Sri Lanka. Rather than follow the practices and conventions of the Westminster system Sri Lanka had very proudly adopted and admired, D. S. Senanayake's son Dudley became prime minster without passing the all-important Westminster litmus test of demonstrating he had the confidence of the popularly-elected House. The person who was politically senior to him in the Cabinet and the governing party as well as Leader of the House (and Dudley's cousin), Sir John Kotelawala, was passed over without consultation with him or anyone in the Cabinet. The person who broke the rules should have known better and it was not even a Sri Lankan. As Manor argues, '. . . the first major violation of the conventions of Westminster to occur in the island was the work of an Englishman': Lord Soulbury the author of the constitution. Soulbury, Governor-General since 1949, whose report strongly argued for British conventions to be established in Sri Lanka was now party to one of the most extraordinary breakings of British conventions. Soulbury's reasons for involving the ceremonial position of Governor-General into politics are unclear. Arguments have been made that he was following the instructions of D. S. Senanayake to appoint his son if anything happened to him or that he wanted to prevent the succession of Sir John Kotelawala due to his irascible and unpredictable nature, which the British believed could have led to dictatorship and the annulment of the valuable defence agreements (Kumarasingham 2013; Manor 1988). Regardless of the motives the action showed how easily the political conventions could be manipulated. Kotelawala eventually did succeed his cousin in 1953 and effectively removed Soulbury from Queen's House not long after—showing how the same conventions could be manipulated the other way—not a good omen for good governance.

The Sri Lankan Government was also adept at manipulating the rules on who could and could not be citizens of the country. Almost unnoticed at the time and overshadowed by the Sinhalese–Sri Lankan Tamil rivalry was another episode during this early period, which reflected poorly on Sri Lankan national governance. Most Indian Tamils or 'Estate Tamils' in Sri Lanka had been brought in the nineteenth century to work as labourers on the tea plantations in the central highlands. Sri Lankans, particularly the Kandyan Sinhalese community in the central provinces, were highly concerned about the 'swamping' of the Estate Tamils who could numerically outnumber them in their own electorates. Starting with the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and other laws citizenship was effectively denied to this group of largely illiterate and property-less people whose families had often been working on the island for generations. The Estate Tamils' inability to get citizenship was coupled with the removal of any right to vote. Therefore almost 12 per cent of the population lost their ability to choose their representatives. D. S. Senanayake justification was that this group were merely 'birds of passage' and not tied to the island, but in reality he and his successors did not want this not insignificant numerical group to wield any political power over elections (Shastri 1999). Despite any ramifications other minority groups could take from this there was little effective defence of the Indian Tamils from the other groups including the Sri Lankan Tamil parties. The lessons of how easily rights could be taken away were not learnt in this case. However, it would not be long before the communal corollary was evident.

## THE FRAGILITY OF NATIONAL UNITY

> You know, my dear fellow [smiling broadly], I have never found anything to excite the people in quite the way this language issue does.
> —S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike interviewed in 1956 (Manor 1989: vi)

Behind the facade of the elite lay what Manor describes of these crucial years as the 'failure of political integration', with the mass/elite discontinuity being at this stage more critical than the Sinhalese/Tamil discontinuity (Manor 1979: 22). Elite expectations certainly were high and followed the lead of the British commissions sent to Colombo. The Donoughmore Constitution, mentioned previously, in 1931 heroically introduced universal suffrage and abolished communal representation, which had been an institutional attribute of all legislative bodies on the island since 1833. The Commissioners had virtuously denounced the primitive parochial connotations of communal representation as being unworthy of a modern democratic state. Though before 1931 it should be remembered (and even for years afterwards) evidence of members voting as a communal group in the Legislative and State Councils, apart from constitutional questions, was not common. Interestingly almost all members of the elite-bodied Legislative Council were against the extension of the electorate to the illiterate masses and many in the chamber, including all the minorities groups, opposed the end of communal representation.

The minorities had proportionately enjoyed, generally, higher representation before the 1931 reforms so were wary of the changes. The critique was that the Donoughmore Commission had eliminated communal representation, but had instituted no substantive mechanisms—electoral or constitutional—to ensure representation of minorities and for their interests and identity to be protected. Interestingly, across around the same time as decisions were taken to abolish communal representation the Simon Commission and the Round Table conferences were recommending schemes to strengthen minority representation and rights for India. A paradoxical outcome of this move to eradicate communal representation was the growth of communal organisations, which in turn made pan-community organisations less effective. By the time of the Soulbury Commission in the 1940s there were even more claims for special representation over territorial representation. Nonetheless, the Soulbury Commission rejected not only the Tamil Congress proposal for guaranteed representation for minorities, but also proposals from minority groups as diverse as the Ceylon Moors' Association, the All-Ceylon Scheduled Castes' Federation, the Catholic Union of Ceylon, the Ceylon Malayali Mahajana Sabha, the Ceylon Muslim League, the Dutch Burgher Union, the Malay Political Association and even the Central Fisheries Union of Ceylon, who, using different methods argued for separate and legally stipulated representation in parliament.

The Soulbury Commission and the Colonial Office faced the eloquent, but also the most controversial proposals from the Tamil Congress leader G. G. Ponnambalam. Ponnambalam, whose party did not represent all Tamils, infamously advocated that the 'major community should be given a relative majority and not an absolute majority in the Legislature'. This would in effect mean 'fifty-fifty' representation with the Sinhalese having half the seats and the rest filled by the minorities. Ponnambalam believed that the Sinhalese as the majority community would thus be 'deprived of a primary motive to perpetuate communalism' and end their potential 'domination' as a 'permanent racial majority [that was] unalterable by any appeal to the electorate'. Ponnambalam questioned why Sri Lanka's minorities received no 'weightage in representation' when this principle in plural societies had been accepted by 'His Majesty's Government' in respect to the French Canadians under the Act of Confederation of North America, 1867; Muslims in Cyprus, Māori in New Zealand and Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others under the Government of India Act 1935 and elsewhere in the Empire. Contrary to the arguments of Senanayake, the Tamil Congress leader did not see how the British model could work in Sri Lanka without stringent safeguards.

> . . . all the conditions and prerequisites . . . thought . . . necessary for the successful functioning of English Parliamentary institutions are still non-existent. It professes to appreciate the difficulty of applying the principles of Western Democracy to Ceylon. It also admits that the prospect of transplanting British institutions to Ceylon with success may appear remote. Nevertheless because it fears that modifications of the British form of Government may not prove any more successful it recommends for Ceylon a method of Government of which it "knows something about" and which is a "result of very long experience". The obvious reply to this is that the British method of Government of today is the result of the experience of centuries of its working by the British people and adapted to their particular genius. To recommend such a Constitution for Ceylon in the face of the experience of the minorities for the last fourteen years in the anticipation that certain hopes and expectations will be realised will amount to the handing over of the future welfare of a large section of the people of the Island to the unfettered control of a permanent communal majority.[14]

Ponnambalam, however, did not represent the other minorities or even his own community. The radical idea of 'fifty-fifty' was strenuously attacked by Senanayake and his allies and vigorously rejected by the Soulbury Commission as inimical for the functioning of a modern democracy based on the individual and not the outdated atavisms of kinship. Senanayake astutely dulled Ponnambalam's rhetoric by inviting him to join the first Cabinet. The fact remained however that if the British had listened to the protestations of the Tamil Congress and other Sinhalese groups and many other organisations based on political, ideological, ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional, caste and even commercial communities the British would have heard different arguments on how to construct an independent state. Some of the recommendations the Soulbury Commission had made for minority protection and representation were quietly disposed of or did not eventuate. The provision of the Governor-General to appoint members to both the House of Representatives and the Senate, for instance, who were not adequately represented was a power given to the prime minister instead. Ironically the only racial group that was given special representation in Parliament were the European planters. However, with the inclusion of Ponnambalam and other minorities at the Cabinet table under the UNP governments and the lack of any legislative discrimination (with the major exception of the Indian Tamils mentioned above) Sri Lanka's polity did not produce communal conflict in these years.

However, the election of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1956 changed Sri Lanka forever with the introduction of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956—better known as the Sinhala Only Act. The election of this government and its signature language policy was a watershed for Sri Lanka and ushered in a more virulent form of communalism and provided the roots for the civil war that imprisoned the island for so long. Bandaranaike's election was heralded as an important victory. The UNP had appeared too Westernised and removed from the concerns of the people and was completely destroyed in the 1956 election—humiliatingly left with just eight seats. The peaceful transition to the populist coalition with Bandaranaike's SLFP at the helm seemed to show democratic maturity—it was the first time in South Asia the governing party had been ejected by the electorate. Bandaranaike has masterfully campaigned on policies most likely to appeal to the majority Sinhalese hinterland. Eschewing the trappings of the elite Bandaranaike, evoking the powerful Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalism first effectively promoted by the revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala in the early twentieth century, the SLFP leader proclaimed the sacredness of Buddhist Sri Lanka and its inviolably link to the Sinhalese people.

The civic nationalism of D. S. Senanayake never convinced many outside Colombo's elite suburb of Cinnamon Gardens. The appeal of Blood and Buddhism was more powerful than the lofty, alien and abstract nature of Ceylonese nationalism. The majority of the people now had a government that targeted their concerns and spoke their language—literally. Pandering to minorities and the West held little hold on the masses. Minorities held a disproportionate hold of the sought after civil service jobs where English was the axiomatic medium and key to advancement. The Sinhalese Only Act was a political tool to engage the electorate and shore up support for the prime minister and his allies. The trouble was it worked too well. Ironically Bandaranaike himself was hardly a man of the people. Bandaranaike was born into one of the most prominent and wealthy Sinhalese families in the land. He was christened an Anglican with the Governor, Sir Joseph West Ridgeway as his godparent (and from whom two of his middle names come from) and his knighted father was famously the highest-ranked 'native' with a highly pro-English sensibility, which manifested itself in sending his son Solomon to Christ Church, Oxford where he studied Classics and ended as Secretary of the Union. Bandaranaike who converted to Buddhism on his return from England and who struggled with the Sinhala script was ironically one of the first advocates of federalism and unity based on diversity. Unlike other members of the elite, Bandaranaike saw the clear distinctions of the peoples of the Sri Lanka, which until British rule, had never been under unitary control. Bandaranaike's arguments for devolved government and recognition of the need to preserve the identities of the main groups of Sri Lanka were ahead of its time. By the 1950s his strategy changed. There was more political capital to be made from appealing to the Sinhalese only—just as the Tamil politicians were departing the main parties to form their own ethnicity-based ones and appeal directly to their own constituency.

Bandaranaike primarily saw the policy as a way to wrest power away from the Senanayakes and had no intention of inciting ethnic conflict. With his aristocratic and intellectual nonchalance Bandaranaike believed he could control the masses and deal with the minorities later. As DeVotta argues the new SLFP prime minister found communalist rhetoric 'antithetical to his core liberal proclivities'. However,

> vanity had deluded Bandaranaike into thinking that the chauvinists he was manipulating could be tamed after obtaining power. Such chutzpah was based on his belief that the emotive Sinhala-only demands would dissipate once the Sinhala-only legislation was passed, and that he could thereafter seek to accommodate Tamil. (DeVotta 2004: 52–74)

This tactic backfired. Bandaranaike forged an agreement with the Tamil Federal Party leader, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, after a satyagraha by the Tamil MPs and their supporters, which brokered relaxing of the new Act with reasonable use of Tamil and limited local area powers in the north and east. However, Bandaranaike annulled the pact after massive protests led by a combination of Buddhist clergy, opposition parties and the Sinhalese masses who saw any concession as an affront to their dignity and historic place in the island's history. Sri Lanka then faced its major inter-ethnic riots for decades. Violence and disorder compelled the government to enact a State of Emergency. Bandaranaike, not wanting to alienate his supporters by appeasing the Tamils, effectively left the governance of the country to Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, Governor-General after Soulbury's departure in 1954. This abnegation of power to protect the citizens of *all* the country had serious consequences. As Wickramasinghe argues, 'the 1958 riots were the first major outbreak against the Tamils and in many ways a point of no return' (2006: 273). There were three key points that made the success of the Sinhala Only Act and the resultant riots critical for the island's future and its race relations. Firstly despite giving one language a privileged status above others, including as the language of government and administration—even in Tamil areas—the constitution was judged not to have been breached. Minority rights were therefore unprotected. Secondly, with the exception of the communists, no party targeted support from all communities. As a recent theoretical framework of multinational democracies concluded, Sri Lanka 'ceased to have any major polity-wide parties after the aggressive nation-state-building policies were initiated in 1956' as the 'temptation increased for winner-take-all outbidding among Sinhalese parties for the votes of Sinhalese for the control of their nation-state' (Stepan et al. 2011: 150–52). Thirdly, and related to the preceding point, Sri Lankan nationalism meant Sinhalese nationalism. The UNP and SLFP would begin from this point the dangerous ethnic outbidding of the Sinhalese masses where there was little political or institutional incentive to make concessions to the Tamils—and if the concessions were made they were robustly protested against by their rival parties. In 1956, for the first time there were no Tamils in the Cabinet. The Tamil parties became redundant to national politics and with their failure to achieve meaningful safeguards and opportunities for their community saw their support erode and transfer to more dangerous extra-parliamentary forces, which saw no benefit in national unity.

## CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka in these early years showed the promise of a peaceful, prosperous and united future. The British and inter-communal elite were almost smug in their confidence that Sri Lanka was the 'model'. Decolonisation came to the island through gradualism and a symbiotic relationship with the colonial power, which though lacking the founding story of a populist and sometime violent freedom struggle was no less successful in attaining sovereignty. Sri Lanka wilfully seemed to follow the lines of the old Commonwealth settler cases over the Congress model. Unlike India, Sri Lanka embraced its British connections and sought stability and continuity through a 'gentlemanly' transfer of power untroubled by mass movements, civil disobedience, nationalist fervour, constituent assembly or even an Act of the British parliament. D. S. Senanayake's reassuring leadership, the lack of violence and outward fidelity to the British parliamentary model established the false confidence. It would not be long before the foundations of this self-belief unravelled. The political and historic forces had not adequately instilled the roots of integration and co-operation necessary for the state of Sri Lanka to function as envisaged. The abstract appeal to cross-community unity proved no competition for the ready, easy attraction of narrower communal messages. Without constitutional safeguards or political incentives, the Sinhalese and Tamil parties saw little point courting the other by at least 1956. The riots of 1958 took the wounds opened by the 1956 Sinhala Only Act to a new level of violence that would soon take the life of Bandaranaike in 1959—when he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk who represented the very forces he sought to promote, but in the end was unable to satisfy. The negative lesson was learnt and national political leaders abandoned multi-ethnic nation-building policies for fear of alienating their core constituency while soon Tamil extremists saw greater leverage to be made from bombs and not peaceful negotiation. Though there was no partition to scar the face of Sri Lanka on Independence like its northern neighbours it would not be long before the assurance of its rhetoric became hollow and conflict engulfed the country to levels thought unimaginable on 4 February 1948.

## NOTES

1. For a wider examination of the issues covered in this chapter, see Kumarasingham (2013).

2. To avoid confusion, I have used Sri Lanka instead of Ceylon throughout this chapter unless taken from a quote. Sri Lanka became the name of the country in 1972 to coincide with the adoption of a republican constitution.

3. Sir Walter Hankinson to Noel-Baker, 17 May 1949, DO 35/3123, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (henceforth TNA).

4. Sir Archibald Nye to Noel-Baker, 6 May 1949, DO 35/3123, TNA.

5. D. S. Senanayake to George Hall, 16 August 1945 in De Silva (1997: 47).

6. D. S. Senanayake to Mr Hall, 16 August 1945 in 1948 in De Silva (1997: 40–42).

7. High Commissioner to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 3 April 1952, DO 35/3127, TNA.

8. D. S. Senanayake's Broadcast, 4 February 1948, Sir Ivor Jennings Papers, Ceylon B3, ICS125, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

9. Senanayake's Broadcast, 4 February 1948, Jennings Papers, ICS125, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

10. D. S. Senanayake to Lord Soulbury, 5 October 1945 in De Silva (1997: 113).

11. Lord Soulbury to Mr Hall, 5 October 1945 in De Silva (1997: 112).

12. 'Report on Ceylon': Cabinet Memorandum by Mr Gordon Walker, 17 March 1948 in De Silva (1997: 365).

13. Ceylon Constitution, Section 46(4) in Jennings (1953: 216). The Soulbury Report pushed for this unique inclusion, arguing that a Prime Minister '. . . as Head of Government, would be the most suitable repository for the information on Imperial Defence policy . . . the Minister of Defence, on instructions when necessary from the Imperial Authorities received through the Governor-General would be the instrument through which Imperial policies would be carried out' (Colonial Office 1945: 95).

14. G. G. Ponnambalam to Mr Hall, 3 November 1945 in De Silva (1997: 141–57).

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